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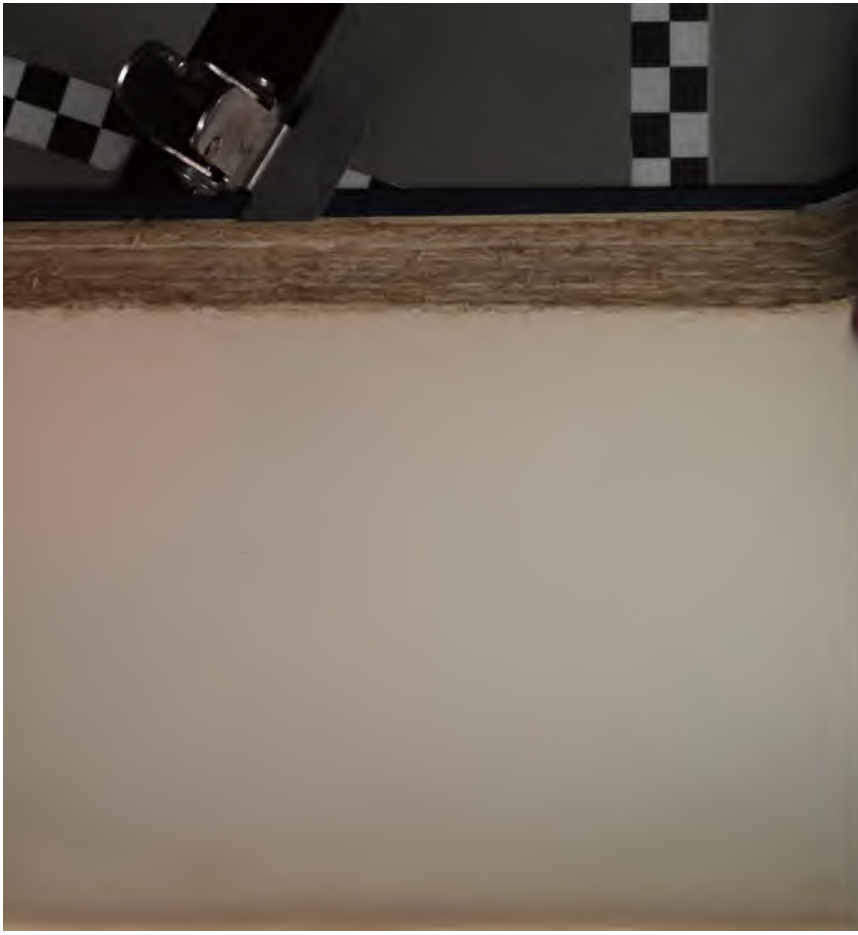

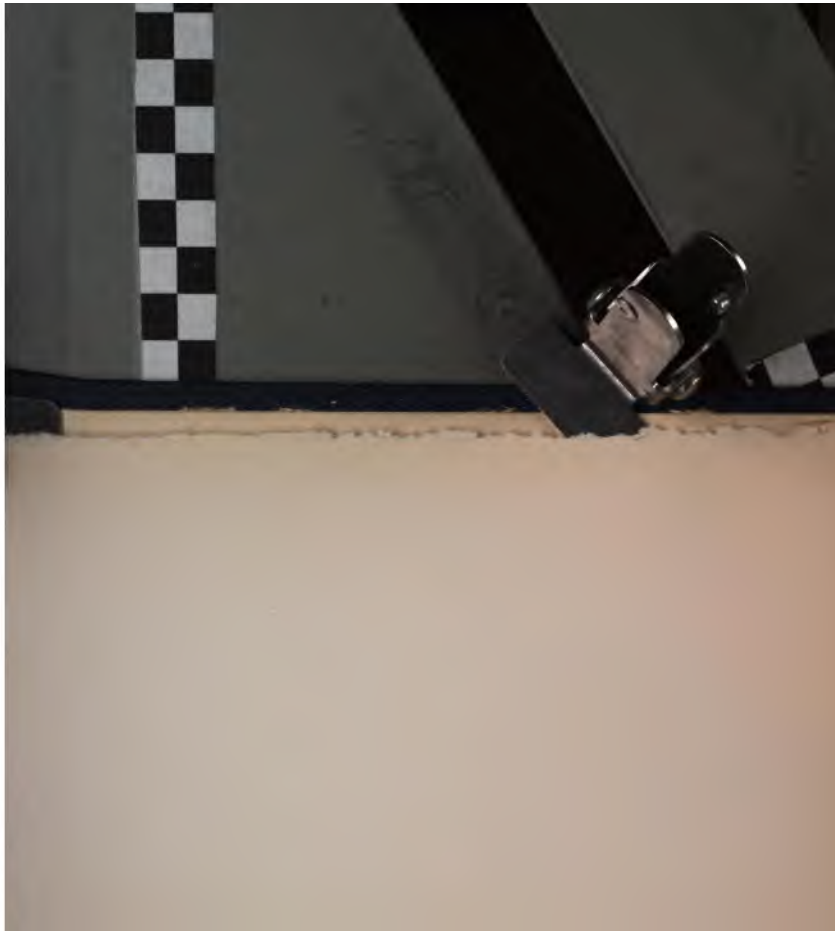

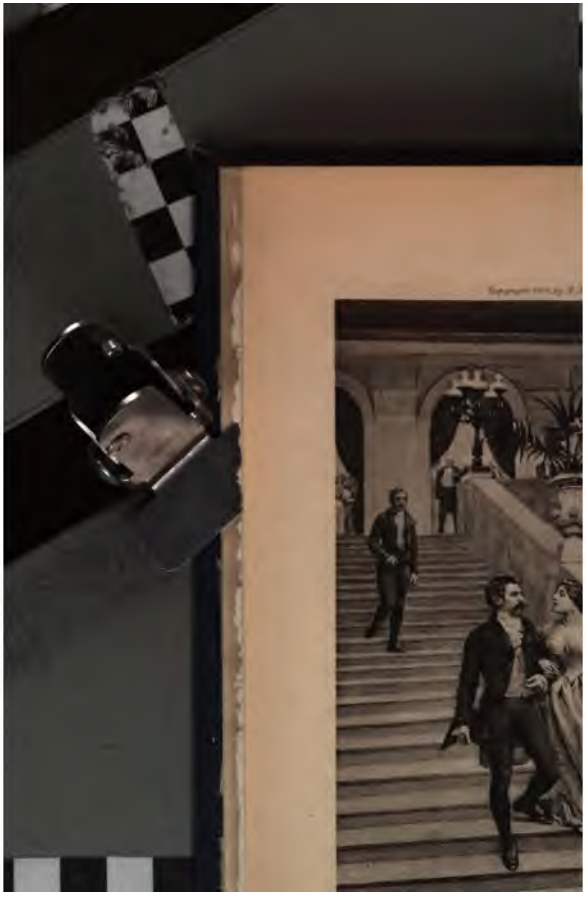

THE BALL AT THE PALMAROSA PALACE

When Signora Agatha reached the foot of the great staircase, where there were few people, she had recovered her tranquillity; but Michel was trembling more than ever.

NOVELS

BY

GEORGE SAND

VOLUME VII

THE PICCININO

VOL. I

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THE PICCININO

TO MY FRIEND

EMMANUEL ARAGO

IN MEMORY OF A PLEASANT EVENING

I

THE TRAVELLER

The region called *piedimonta*, which surrounds the base of Ætna, and of which Catania forms the portion nearest the level of the sea, is, according to the declared opinions of all travellers, the loveliest country in the whole world. It is that fact which impels me to place there the scene of a story which was recently told me, but of which I was forbidden to reveal the real *locus* or the real characters. Therefore, dear reader, pray take the trouble to transport yourself in imagination to the district called Valdemona, or *Valley of the Demons.* It is a beautiful spot, which, however, I do not propose to describe in great detail, for a sufficiently good reason: namely, that I am not familiar with it, and one cannot depict very faithfully what one knows only by hearsay. But there are so many excellent books of travel that you can consult! unless, indeed, you prefer to go thither in person, which I would that I, too, might do, to-morrow, provided that it was not with you, reader; for, in presence of the marvellous beauties of that spot, you would rebuke me for having described it so ill, and there is nothing more disagreeable than a travelling companion who is constantly preaching at you.

In default of something better, my fancy is impelled to

lead you rather far away, beyond the mountains, and to leave in peace for a time the quiet country districts wherein I usually like to frame my tales. The moving cause of this fancy is exceedingly puerile, but I propose to tell it to you.

I do not know whether you remember, assuming that you do me the honor to read me, that I placed before you last year a novel entitled *The Sin of Monsieur Antoine*, the scene of which was laid on the banks of the Creuse, and especially among the ruins of the ancient château of Châteaubrun. Now that château exists, and I drive thither at least once in every year, although it is about ten leagues from my own home. This year I was very coldly received by the old peasant woman who has charge of the ruins.

"Look you!" she cried, in her half-Berrichon, half-Marchois patois, "I don't think much of you; my name is not *Janille*, but *Jennie*. I haven't got any daughter, and I don't lead my master round by the nose. My master don't wear a blouse; you lied about him. I never saw him in a blouse, etc., etc. I don't know how to read, but I do know that you've been writing lies about my master and me. I have no liking for you now."

This harangue apprized me that there still lives, not far from the ruins of Châteaubrun, an old man named Châteaubrun, who never wears a blouse. That is all that I know about him.

But it proved to me that I must needs be most circumspect when writing of La Marche and Berry. That was at least the tenth time that something of that sort had happened to me, and every time persons bearing the name of some of my characters, or living in the localities I have described, have flown into a passion with me and

accused me of slandering them, not deigning to believe that I took their names by chance, and that I did not know of their existence.

To give them time to become calm again, before I return to that region, I propose to make an excursion to Sicily. But how shall I avoid making use of a name that belongs to some inhabitant or some portion of that celebrated island? A Sicilian hero cannot be called Durand or Wolf, nor do I find on the map of the country any name which rhymes with Pontoise or Baden-Baden. I really must baptize my actors and my stage with names that have some rhyme in *a, o* or *i*. I will take those which are easiest to pronounce, so far as is possible, without much heed to geographical accuracy, declaring beforehand that I do not know a cat in Sicily, even by reputation; so that I cannot possibly intend to point at any particular person.

Having made this statement, I am free to choose, and the choice of names is the most embarrassing question that confronts a novelist who wishes to become sincerely attached to the characters he creates. In the first place, I need a princess who has a resounding name, one of those which give you an exalted idea of the person who bears it; and there are such lovely names in that country! Acalia, Madonia, Valcorrente, Valverde, Primosole, Tremisteri, etc.—they all ring true on the ear, like perfect chords. But if perchance there has ever happened in any of the patrician families which bear the names of those seignorial localities, an adventure like that which I am about to describe—a delicate adventure, I confess—why, I am sure to be accused once more of evil-speaking or calumny. Luckily, Catania is very far away; my novels do not, in all probability, pass the lighthouse of Messina, and I trust that the new pope will do in charity

what his predecessor did without knowing why: that to say, keep me in the Index; then I shall be entirely liberty to speak of Italy, certain that Italy, and with st stronger reason Sicily, will never suspect it.

Consequently my princess shall be called the Prince of Palmarosa. I defy you to find sweeter sounds or more flowery meaning in any name in any novel. Ar now for her Christian name, we must think of that. W will call her Agatha, because St. Agatha is the revere patron saint of Catania. But I will urge the reader pronounce the name *Agata*, even if I should happen ina vertently to write it in French, otherwise he will miss th local coloring.

My hero's name shall be Michelangelo Lavoratori, bu we must never confound him with the illustrious Miche angelo Buonarotti, who died at least two hundred yea before my man's birth.

As for the period in which the events are supposed take place—another unpleasant incident of the beginnin of a novel—you are entirely at liberty to select it you self, dear reader. But inasmuch as our characters wi be actuated by ideas now in circulation in the world, an as it would be impossible for me to speak to you as should like to do of the men of past ages, I fancy that th story of the Princess Agatha of Palmarosa and Miche angelo Lavoratori belongs somewhere between 1810 an 1840. Fix the precise year, day, and hour at which w begin our narrative to suit yourself; it is a matter of i difference to me, for my novel is neither historical no descriptive, nor does it pride itself at all upon being exa in either respect.

On the day in question—it was in autumn and broa daylight, if you please—Michelangelo Lavoratori was d scending diagonally across the gorges and ravines whic

alternate with each other from the slopes of Ætna to the fertile plain of Catania. He was coming from Rome; he had crossed the Strait of Messina, he had followed the highroad as far as Taormina. There, intoxicated by the grandeur of the spectacle which his eyes beheld in all directions, and uncertain whether to choose the seashore or the mountains, he had gone forward to some extent at random, torn between his impatience to embrace his father and sister, whom he had not seen for a year, and the temptation to go a little nearer the gigantic volcano, compared to which it seemed to him, as to Spallanzani, that Vesuvius is simply a parlor volcano.

As he was alone and on foot, he had lost his way more than once in that wild region, intersected by vast streams of lava which form on all sides steep mountains and valleys filled with luxuriant vegetation. One travels far and makes very little progress when he must constantly ascend and descend over a distance quadrupled in length by natural obstacles. Michel had taken two days to travel the ten leagues, more or less, which lie between Taormina and Catania as the crow flies; but at last he was drawing near his journey's end, indeed, he had arrived; for, after crossing the Cantaro and passing through Mascarello, Piano-Grande, Valverde, and Mascalucia, he had at last left Santa-Agata on his right and Ficarazzi on his left. Therefore he was only about a mile from the suburbs of the city; if he had walked a quarter of an hour more, he would have reached the end of the adventures of a pedestrian journey, during which, despite the fascination and the enthusiastic admiration which such natural scenery inspires in a young artist, he had suffered considerably from heat in the ravines, from cold on the mountain-tops, from hunger, and from fatigue.

But, as he skirted the wall of a vast park, on the slope

of the last hill which he still had to cross, and as, with his eyes fixed on the city and the harbor, he quickened his pace to make up for lost time, he stumbled over the stump of an olive-tree. The pain caused by the blow was most acute; for, after two days' travelling over sharp slag, and pozzuolana as hot as red-hot ashes, his shoes were sadly worn and his feet cruelly bruised and sore.

Being compelled to stop, he found himself in front of a niche in the wall, containing a madonna. This little chapel, sheltered by a stone projection and provided with a bench, offered a hospitable resting-place to wayfarers, and to beggars, monks, and others a convenient station at the very door of the *villa*, of which our traveller could descry the handsome buildings through the orange-trees planted in a triple row along an avenue of considerable length.

Michel, more annoyed than cast down by this sudden hurt, dropped his travelling satchel, seated himself on the bench, and rubbed his injured foot, but soon forgot it to lose himself in meditation.

In order that the reader may understand the reflections which his surroundings suggested to the young man, it is essential that I should introduce him somewhat more fully. Michel was eighteen years of age and was a student of painting at Rome. His father, Pier-Angelo Lavoratori, was a mere dauber, a decorator, but very skilful in his line. And, as is well known, in Italy the artisans whose business it is to cover walls and ceilings with frescoes are almost all genuine artists. Whether from tradition, or from natural good taste, they produce some very attractive decorations; and in the most modest abodes, even in wretched taverns, the eye is charmed by wreaths and rosework done in a fascinating style, or it may be by

borders simply, the coloring of which is happily contrasted with the dull tints of the panels and wainscoting. These frescoes are sometimes executed as perfectly as our wall-papers, and they are much superior to them in this respect, that one detects in them the greater ease of manner of work done by hand. Nothing can be more dismal than the stiff and regular decorations produced by machinery. The beauty of Chinese vases, and, indeed, of Chinese work in general, is attributable to that capricious air of spontaneity which the human hand alone can impart to its work. Grace, freedom, boldness, the unexpected, and even ingenuous awkwardness are, in decoration, elements of charm which we are losing day by day, as we depend more and more upon the resources of machinery and looms.

Pier-Angelo was one of the most rapid and ingenious of these decorators—*adornatori*. He was a native of Catania, and had reared his family there until the period of Michel's birth, when he abruptly left his province and settled in Rome. The reason he assigned for this voluntary exile was that his family was increasing in size, that there was too much competition in Catania, and that consequently his work no longer sufficed for his needs; wherefore he proposed to seek his fortune elsewhere. But people said under their breath that he had fled from the resentment of certain all-powerful patricians who were devoted to the court of Naples.

Everyone knows the bitter hatred of that conquered and down-trodden people for the government on the other side of the strait. The Sicilian, proud and revengeful, rumbles incessantly like his volcano, and sometimes erupts. It was whispered that Pier-Angelo had been involved in an attempt at a popular uprising, and that he had been obliged to fly, carrying with him his brushes and

his household goods. To be sure, his social and kind temperament seemed to contradict such a suppositior but the lively imaginations of the good people of th suburb of Catania must needs devise an extraordinar motive for the disappearance of one so loved and regrette by all his confrères.

At Rome he was hardly more fortunate, for he had th sorrow of losing all his children there except Michel ; an ere long his wife died in giving birth to a daughter, whos young brother was her godfather, and who received th name of Mila, a contraction of Michelangela.

Having lost these two children, Pier-Angelo, albei more melancholy, was much more at ease financially and by dint of earnest work, he succeeded in giving hi son an education far superior to that which he had him self received. He displayed a predilection for that boy which almost amounted to weakness, and Michel, al though poor and obscure, was a veritable spoiled child.

Now, Pier-Angelo had spurred on his other sons t work, and had imparted to them early in life the ardo which was consuming him. But, whether because they had succumbed to excessive toil for which they had no received from Heaven the same aptitude and strength a their father, or because Pier-Angelo, finding his family reduced to three persons, no longer deemed it necessary to have assistance, it is certain that he seemed more anx- ious to handle tenderly the health of his last remaining son, than to provide him betimes with a means of liveli- hood.

Nevertheless, the child loved painting, and in play pro- duced fruit, flowers, and birds, in which the coloring was exquisite. One day he asked his father why he never introduced figures in his frescoes.

"What do you say? figures?" replied the good man,

who had an abundance of common sense: "one must paint very beautiful ones, or else let them alone. Figure painting is beyond such talent as I have been able to acquire, and whereas people think well of my garlands and arabesques, I should be very sure of making connoisseurs laugh if I should attempt to represent limping cupids or hump-backed nymphs dancing on my ceilings."

"Suppose I should try!" said the child, whom nothing daunted.

"Try on paper, and however successful you may be for your years, you will soon see that you must learn before you know."

Michel tried. Pier-Angelo showed his son's sketches to some connoisseurs, and to some painters too, who saw that the child had much talent, and that it would be well for him not to be confined too closely to the drudgery of mixing colors. Thereupon, Pier-Angelo determined to make a painter of him, sent him to one of the best studios in Rome, and relieved him entirely from preparing colors and daubing walls.

"One of two things will happen," he said to himself with good reason; "either the child will become a master, or, if he has only trifling talent, he will come back to the trade of decorating with knowledge that I do not possess, and he will be a workman of the first order in his line. In either case he will have a freer and more comfortable life than mine."

Not that Pier-Angelo was dissatisfied with his lot. He was blest with that improvidence, that recklessness, one might say, which are characteristic of the most laborious and most robust men. He always relied upon destiny, perhaps because he relied most of all upon his strong arms and his courage. But as he was a very shrewd and intelligent observer, he had already detected in Michel the

gleam of a spark of ambition which his other children had never had. He drew the conclusion that the measure of happiness with which he had been content would not suffice for that more delicately balanced organism. Tolerant to excess, and thoroughly convinced that every man has aptitudes which no other man can estimate accurately, he respected Michel's impulses and inclinations as manifestations of the will of Heaven, and therein was no less imprudent than generous.

For that blind complaisance was certain to lead, and did in fact lead to this result—that Michelangelo became accustomed never to suffer, never to be thwarted, and to look upon his own personality as more important and more interesting than that of other people. He often mistook his caprices for desires, and his desires for rights. Moreover, he was attacked early in life by the disease peculiar to fortunate mortals, that is to say, the fear that they may not always be so fortunate; and in the midst of his progress he was often paralyzed by the fear of failing. A vague disquietude seized upon him, and as he was naturally energetic and bold, it sometimes made him sullen and irritable.

But we shall obtain a better conception of his character by following him in the reflections he made at the gates of Catania, in the little chapel in which he had taken his seat.

II

THE TRAVELLER'S STORY

I have forgotten to tell you, and it is important that you should know, why Michel had been separated from his father and sister for a year past.

Although he earned his living readily at Rome, and despite his happy temperament, Pier-Angelo had never been able to accustom himself to living abroad, far from his cherished fatherland. Like the genuine islander he was, he regarded Sicily as a land favored by Heaven in every respect, and the mainland as a place of exile. When the Catanians speak of the terrible volcano which overwhelms and ruins them so often, they carry love of country so far as to say: *Our Ætna!*—"Ah!" said Pier-Angelo, on the day that he passed near the lava fields of Vesuvius, "if you had seen our famous Catanian wave! that was grand and wonderful! You would never dare to mention yours again!" He referred to the terrible eruption of 1669, which sent a river of fire to the very centre of the city, and destroyed half of the population and buildings. The destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum seemed to him a jest.—"Psha!" he would say proudly, "I have seen bigger earthquakes! You should come to our home if you want to know what an earthquake is!"

In fact, he sighed incessantly for the moment when he could see again his dear furnace and its beloved gate of hell.

When Michel and Mila, wh
cheerful humor, saw that he w
they were grieved and distu
with respect to persons with w
a rare phenomenon. There
children that he was thinking
were not in excellent health,"
constantly argue with myself,
killed me long ago."

But when his children spo
Sicily, he would wave his han
if to say: "I cannot cross the
cape Charybdis only to fall in

Once or twice he inadverte
Dionigi died a long while ago,
is still living." And when hi
as to what reason he had to
shook his finger and said: "
have mentioned those princes

But it happened one day
work in a certain palace in Ro
which he found on the floor,
who had looked in upon him o
of Painting, he exclaimed: "
me not to know how to read!
news from my dear Sicily i
Michel, what is this word here
Catania. Yes, yes, I can rea
and tell me what is going on a

Michel glanced at the paper,
posed to light the principal str
gen gas.

"Great Heaven!" ejaculat

And he threw his cap up to the ceiling in his joy.

"There is more news," said the young man, looking over the paper. "The Prince-Cardinal Hieronymo of Palmarosa has been obliged to suspend the exercise of the important functions which the Neapolitan government has entrusted to him. His eminence has been stricken by paralysis, and his life is deemed to be in danger. Pending a definite decision from the medical profession concerning the mental and physical condition of that noble personage, the government has entrusted his functions temporarily to his excellency, the Marquis of——"

"What do I care to whom?" cried Pier-Angelo, snatching the paper from his son's hands with extraordinary excitement, "Prince Hieronymo is off to join his brother Dionigi in the tomb, and we are saved!"—Then, after trying to spell out Prince Hieronymo's name for himself, as if he feared that his son might have made a mistake, he returned the journal to him and bade him read the paragraph again, very carefully and very slowly.

When this was done, Pier-Angelo crossed himself devoutly.

"O Providence!" he cried, "Thou hast permitted old Pier-Angelo to witness the extinction of his persecutors, and to return to his native city! Embrace me, Michel! this event is of no less importance to you than to me. Whatever happens, remember that Pier-Angelo Lavoratori has been a good father to you!"

"What do you mean, father? Are you still in any danger? If you must return to Sicily, I will go with you."

"We will talk of that later, Michel. Meanwhile, silence!—Forget everything, even the words that have escaped me."

Two days later, Pier-Angelo folded his tents and started for Catania with his daughter. He would not consent to take Michel, despite the latter's earnest entreaties.

"No," he said, "I am not certain that I shall be able to settle at Catania, for I had the papers read to me again this morning, and they don't say that Cardinal Hieronymo is dead. They don't mention him at all. A personage so favored by the government, and so rich, could not recover or die without a great sensation. So I conclude that he is still alive, but that he is a little better. His temporary substitute is a most excellent nobleman, a true patriot, and a friend of the people. I have nothing to fear from the police so long as we have him to deal with. But if by a miracle this Prince Hieronymo should come back to life and health, I should have to return to Rome at once; and in that case what good would it have done to make you take this journey, which would interrupt your studies?"

"But," said Michel, "why not wait until this prince's fate is decided, before you start yourself? I have no idea what you have to fear from him and from your presence in Catania, father; for you have never chosen to explain yourself clearly in that respect; but it alarms me to have you start, all alone but for this child, for a land where you are not certain of being well received. I know that the police officials of absolute governments are suspicious and troublesome; and if you had nothing worse to fear than a temporary imprisonment, even then what would become of our little Mila, all alone in a city where you no longer have any acquaintances? Let me go with you, in heaven's name! I will be Mila's protector and defender, and when I see that you are comfortably settled and in no danger, then I will return to Rome and resume my studies, if you care to remain in Sicily."

"Yes, Michel, I know, I understand," replied Pier-Angelo. "You have no wish to remain in Sicily, and your youthful ambition would be ill-content with a long stay in an island which you believe to be destitute of all resources and monuments of art. You are mistaken; we have such noble monuments! Palermo fairly swarms with them. Ætna is the grandest spectacle that nature can offer to a painter, and we have painters, too. Morales filled our fatherland with masterpieces worthy to be compared with those of Rome and Florence!"

"Excuse me, father," said Michel, smiling, "Morales is not to be compared with Raphael, Michelangelo, or any of the masters of the Florentine school."

"What do you know about it? That is just like children. You have never seen his great works, his best pieces; you will see them in Sicily. And such a climate! such skies! such fruit! A veritable land of promise!"

"Very well, father, permit me to go there with you," said Michel. "That is precisely what I ask."

"No, no!" cried Pier-Angelo, earnestly. "I forgot myself in sounding the praises of Catania, and I do not want you to go there with me now. I know that your loving heart and your anxiety for us urge you to it; but I know also that your real inclination does not lie that way. I want the desire to come to you naturally, when the hour of your destiny has struck, and when you will kiss the soil of your fatherland with love, instead of treading it, as you would do to-day, with disdain."

"These reasons are of little weight, father, in view of the anxiety I shall feel during your absence. I prefer to be bored and waste my time in Sicily, rather than to let you go there without me and pass my time here dreaming of dangers and disasters."

"Thanks my child, and farewell!" said the old man, embracing him affectionately. "If I must tell you explicitly, I cannot take you. Here is half of all the money I possess; be careful of it until I am able to send you more. You can depend upon it that I shall not waste my time at Catania, and that I will work energetically to procure the means for you to continue your painting. I shall need time for the journey and to get settled; after which I shall find plenty of work, for I had many friends and patrons in my country, and I know that I shall find some of them there still. Do not dream of dangers and disasters. I will be prudent; and although duplicity and fear are not my ordinary failings, I have too much Sicilian blood in my veins not to be able to display the cunning of an old fox, at need. I know Ætna as well as I know my own pocket, and its ravines are deep enough to keep a poor fellow like me hidden for a long while. Besides, I have maintained friendly relations with my kinsfolk, as you know. I have a brother a Capuchin, who is a *great man.* Mila will find shelter and protection with them, if need be. I will write to you—that is to say your sister will write for me—as often as possible, and you shall not be left long in uncertainty as to our fate. Do not mention the names of the Princes of Palmarosa, unless we mention them to you first."

"And meanwhile," said Michel, "shall I not know what I have to fear or to hope from these princes?"

"You? nothing, upon my word," replied Pier-Angelo; "but you do not know Sicily; you would not have the prudence that is absolutely necessary in countries that are subjected to foreigners. You have the ideas of a young man, all the ardent ideas which circulate here in Rome, under the cloak of lax administration, but which, in Sicily, are hidden and held in reserve under the ashes

of the volcanoes. You would compromise me, and they would manufacture a conspiracy against the court of Naples out of a single phrase thoughtlessly uttered by you in your fervent liberalism. Farewell once more; do not detain me. I must see my country once more! You have no idea what it means to me to have been born at Catania, and to have been away eighteen years; or, rather, you do not understand it, for it is true that you were born at Catania yourself, and that the story of my exile is the story of yours! But you were brought up at Rome, and you look upon Rome as your country, alas!"

A month later Michel received, by the hand of a mechanic who arrived in Rome from Sicily, a letter from Mila, which informed him that their journey was most successful; that they had been welcomed with open arms by their relations and former friends; that Pier-Angelo had found work and valuable patronage; but that the cardinal was still living, although not greatly to be feared, because he had withdrawn from the world and from public affairs. However, Pier-Angelo did not wish Michel to join him, for no one knew *what might happen.*

Until then Michel had been depressed and anxious, for he loved his father and sister dearly; but, as soon as his mind was at rest with respect to them, he involuntarily rejoiced that he was at Rome and not at Catania. His life there had been very pleasant since his father had permitted him to devote himself to painting. Favored by his masters, who were attracted to him not only because of his happy aptitude, but also because of a certain elevation of mind and of language above his years and his condition, received in the society of young men much richer and more aristocratic than he—and we must admit that he was much more accessible to their advances than

to those of the sons of artisans, his equals—he devoted his leisure to the cultivation of his brain and the enlargement of his circle of ideas. He read rapidly and greedily, he frequented the theatres, he conversed with artists; in a word, he prepared himself wonderfully well for a free and noble existence, to which, however, he was by no means certain that he could properly aspire.

For the resources of the poor painter in distemper, who sent half of his wages to him, were not inexhaustible. Illness might put an end to them at any time, and painting is so serious and profound an art that one must study many years before one can hope to make profitable use of it.

This thought terrified Michel, and sometimes cast him into the deepest dejection. "O father!" he was saying to himself, when we met him at the gate of a palace near his native town: "Did you not, through excessive affection for me, do yourself as well as me a great injury, by urging me on in the pathway of ambition? I do not know if I shall succeed, yet I feel that it will be very hard for me to resume the life which you lead, and for which fortune destined me. I am not so strong as you; I am a degenerate in the matter of physical strength, which is the stamp of nobility of our race. I cannot walk, I am fatigued beyond measure by what would be simply healthy exercise for you, at sixty years of age. And here am I used up, wounded in the foot, by my own fault, by reason of my absent-mindedness or my awkwardness. And yet I was born among these mountains, and I see children running over these sharp lava beds as I would walk on a carpet. Yes, my father was right, this is a beautiful fatherland; one may well be proud of having issued like the lava, from the sides of yonder terrible mountain! But one should be wholly, not half worthy of such a glo-

rious origin. He should be a great man and fill the world with peals of thunder and lightning flashes; or else he should be a stout-hearted peasant or a determined brigand, and live in the desert, without other resource than a carbine and a pitiless heart. That too is a poetic destiny. But it is too late for me; I have learned too many things, I know the laws, society and mankind too well. That which is heroism in these artless and uncivilized mountaineers would be cowardice and crime in me. My conscience would reproach me for having succeeded in attaining grandeur by genius and the gifts of civilization, and for having relapsed, from impotence, to a condition of brigandage. So I should have to live an obscure, insignificant life!"

Let us leave Michel for a little while to nurse and rub his aching foot, and inform the reader why, despite his love for Rome and the pleasant days he passed there, he found himself now at the gates of Catania.

From month to month his sister had written to him, at her father's dictation: "You cannot come yet, and we cannot make any decision concerning our own future. The sick man is as well as a man can be who has lost the use of his arms and his legs. But his head still lives and retains a remnant of power. Here is some money; be careful of it, my child; for, although I have all the work I want, wages are lower here than at Rome."

Michel tried to be careful of the money, which represented to him the sweat of his father's brow. He quivered with shame and dismay when his young sister, who worked at spinning silk—a very common industry in that part of Sicily,—secretly added a gold piece to her father's remittance. Evidently the poor child subjected herself to great privations to obtain for her brother the wherewithal to amuse himself for an hour. Michel vowed that

he would not touch those gold pieces, but would save the
and carry back to Mila all her little savings.

But Michel loved pleasure; he craved a certain amou
of luxury, and he did not know how to save. He h
princely tastes, that is to say, he loved to give, and r
warded handsomely any *facchino* who brought him a pi
ture or a letter. And then too, painting materials a
very expensive. Again, when Michel was in the con
pany of wealthy young men, he would have blushed n
to pay his scot like the rest. So that he ran in debt to
small amount, albeit very large for the budget of a po
decorator. There came a time when, the debt imitatin
the snow-ball, it became necessary for him either to fl
in disgrace or to resign himself to take up some mor
humble occupation than historical painting. Tremblin
with rage and grief, Michel sacrificed the gold piece
which he had determined to carry back to Mila some day
But, finding that he was still far from solvent, he con
fessed everything in a letter to his father, blaming himsel
with something very like despair. A week later a banke
forwarded to the young man the sum necessary to pay his
debt, and to live some time longer on the same footing.
Then came a letter from Mila, who said, still at Pier-
Angelo's dictation: "A kind friend lent me the money
I have sent to you; but I shall have to work six months
to repay the loan. Try, my son, not to run in debt again
until then, for if you do we shall have arrears of indebt-
edness which we can never discharge."

Although Michel had never been reprimanded by his
father, he expected something in the nature of a rebuke
this time. When he realized the excellent man's inex-
haustible kindness and philosophic courage, he was heart-
broken, and though unable to blame himself for errors into
which his position had irresistibly led him, he did blame

himself, as for a crime, for having accepted that too brilliant position. He formed a mighty resolution, and was assisted in carrying it out by the idea that he was consummating a great sacrifice, and that if he had not the making of a great painter in him, he had at all events the heroism of a great character. Thus vanity had much to say in this effort of his will, but it was an ingenuous and noble vanity. He paid his debts and bade his friends farewell, announcing his purpose to abandon painting and to work with his father at his trade.

Then, without informing his father of his coming, he packed in a bag a few choice clothes, a sketch-book, and a number of boxes of water-colors, not realizing that those symbols of luxury and art showed that he carried the thought of luxury and art with him; and he started for Catania, where we have seen him on the point of arriving.

III

MONSIGNORE

Despite this heroic renunciation of all the dreams of his youth, poor Michel experienced at that moment a sort of grief-stricken dismay. The journey had diverted his thoughts from the consequences of his sacrifice. The sight of Ætna had exalted his imagination. The joy he felt at the thought of seeing his excellent father and his dear little sister had sustained his courage. But this unlucky accident of a trifling wound in the foot, and the necessity of halting for an instant, gave him leisure for reflection for the first time since he had left Rome.

Moreover, that was an exceedingly solemn moment to his youthful mind. He saw before him the domes of his native city, one of the loveliest cities in the world, even to him who comes from Rome, and the one of all others whose location is most imposing to the eye.

This city, so many times devastated by the volcano, is not very ancient, and the style of the seventeenth century, which prevails in its buildings, has not the grandeur or the pure taste of earlier periods. Nevertheless, Catania, built upon an extensive plan and of antique spaciousness, is of a Greek type, taken as a whole. The sombre color of the lava from which it has risen again and again after being swallowed up by it, as if it had found the seeds of renewed life in its own ashes, after the manner of the phœnix, the open plain which surrounds it, and the cruel reefs of lava which have taken root in its harbor, as if to darken with their stern shadow even the shimmer of the waves—everything about the city is majestic and melancholy.

But it was not the aspect of the place that engrossed the thoughts of our young traveller. His own plight made it seem to him more gloomy and terror-inspiring than it had been made by the passage of the flames that belched forth from the cave of the Cyclops. He saw before him a place of trials and of expiation, in face of which a cold perspiration burst from every pore. It was there that he was about to bid farewell to the world of art, to the society of enlightened men, to unchecked reveries, and to the studious leisure of the artist summoned to an exalted destiny. It was there that he must resume, after ten years of a highly-favored existence, the artisan's apron, the hateful sizing-pot, the conventional festoon, the decoration of reception rooms and corridors. And, worse than all the rest, it was there that he would

have to work twelve hours a day and go to bed exhausted, lacking time and strength to read or muse in a picture gallery; there that he must resign himself to do without other society than that of the Sicilian common people, so poor and so unclean that the poetic charm of his features and his intellect could scarcely penetrate the rags and degradation of poverty. In a word, the gate of Catania was, to that poor exile, the gate of the accursed city described by Dante.

At the thought, a torrent of tears, long held in check or turned aside, rushed from his eyes, and whoever had seen him thus, young, comely, pale, seated outside the gate of a palace, with his hand lying carelessly upon his injured foot, would inevitably have thought of the gladiator of old, wounded in combat, but weeping for his defeat rather than for the pain.

The bells of a number of mules ascending the hill, and the appearance of a strange caravan coming directly toward him, forcibly changed the current of Michelangelo Lavoratori's reflections. The mules were superb creatures, richly caparisoned and decorated with plumes. On their long purple saddle-cloths gleamed the insignia of the cardinalate, the triple cross of gold, surmounted by the little hat and tassels. They were laden with baggage and led by servants dressed in black, with gloomy, suspicious faces; then came abbés and other ecclesiastics, with black short-clothes, red stockings and large silver buckles on their shoes; some on horseback, others in litters. A very stout individual, in a black coat, with his hair in a bag, a diamond on his finger, and a sword at his side, rode gravely upon a magnificent ass. From his air of importance, somewhat more candid than the crafty expressions of the churchmen who surrounded him, he could readily be identified as his eminence's phy-

sician. He escorted his
ried in a chair, or rather
men, beside whom wa
whole procession consis
the uselessness of each
by the rapt meditation
face.

Michel, deeply interes
cession which surpassed
direction, that was most
and stood near the gatew
view of the principal per
ter able to gratify his c
in front of the enormou
abbé, with a repulsive
opened the gate himself
peculiar smile.

The cardinal was a ma
had once been corpulent
and emaciated, as the res
The skin upon his face, o
laxed, hung in innumera
face a strong resemblance
sage of a torrent. Desp
decomposition, there was
upon those lifeless feature
make the faintest moveme
black eyes still glowed, th
vitality.

The contrast between
the corpse-like face impre
could not avoid a feeling o
bared his head before that
will. Everything that

nature produced its effect upon that young man's imagination, because he was himself ambitious of power and authority, and, except for the gleam of those tyrannical eyes, it is doubtful if it would have occurred to him to remove his straw hat.

But, as his modest garb and his dusty shoes indicated a man of the people rather than a great painter in embryo, the cardinal's people and the cardinal himself naturally expected to see him kneel, which he did not do, and his neglect scandalized them terribly.

The cardinal was the first to notice it, and as his bearers were about to pass through the gate, he made a sign with his eyebrows which was instantly read by his physician, who rode always beside him, and was ordered to keep his eyes always fixed upon those of his eminence.

The doctor had just enough wit to understand from the cardinal's expression that he wished to manifest some desire or other; so he ordered a halt, and advised Abbé Ninfo, his eminence's secretary, the same who had opened the gate with his own hand, and with a key taken from his own pocket. The abbé hastened forward, as he had done before, and placed his body in front of the door of the chair in such way as to conceal it from the rest of the procession. Thereupon there took place between his eminence and him a mysterious dialogue, so mysterious that no one could say whether his eminence made himself understood by speech, or simply by the play of his features. Ordinarily the paralytic dignitary uttered nothing more than unintelligible grunts, which became a frightful roar when he was angry; but Abbé Ninfo understood those grunts so well, when assisted by his eminence's expressive glance and his intimate knowledge of his character and designs, that he interpreted his master's wishes and ordered them executed with an intelligence, a rapidity

and a careful attention
marvellous. Indeed it
ral to be accepted as g
priests, and they declar
the power of speech, bu
found diplomacy, he p
except with Abbé Ninf
however that his emin
completely as his arms
portions of his being we
the digestion. "With t
to be a hundred years o
Jupiter shook Olympus,
brow."

The result of the stran
sharp eyes and the eloq
was that the abbé turned
to him to draw near. M
nothing of the sort, and
him; but the Sicilian sp
he stood on his guard. H
told him of the dangers t
certain cardinal, and, alt
the man before him was
curred to him that he m
ronymo, of Palmarosa.
dissemble, and he approa
adorned with his eminen

"What are you doin
manded in a surly tone.

"No, your excellency,
tranquillity, although he
tioner. "I am passing b

The abbé glanced into

given to understand that it was useless to intimidate wayfarers, for he suddenly changed his tone and manner as he turned again to Michel.

"My friend," he said benignantly, "you seem unfortunate; are you a mechanic?"

"Yes, your excellency," said Michel, resolved to speak as little as possible.

"And you are fatigued? you have come a long distance?"

"Yes, your excellency."

"But you are strong for your years. How old are you?"

"Twenty-one."

Michel could safely risk that falsehood; for, although he had as yet no beard on his chin, he had attained his full growth, and his active and restless brain had already caused him to lose the first bloom of youth. In this last reply he complied with a special injunction which his father had laid upon him when they parted, and which came to his mind most opportunely: "If you come to Sicily to join me one day or another," said old Pier-Angelo, "remember that, until you have actually joined me, you must not say a word of truth in reply to people who seem to you curious and inquisitive. Tell them neither your name, nor your age, nor your profession, nor mine, nor whence you come, nor whither you are going. The police are more meddlesome than shrewd. Lie boldly and have no fear."

"If my father should hear me," thought Michel, after he had thus distinguished himself, "he would be satisfied with me."

"It is well," said the abbé, and he stepped away from the prelate's door, so that the latter could see the poor devil who had thus attracted his attention. Michel's eyes

met the moribund's terrible glance, and he thereupon felt more distrust and aversion than respect for that narrow and despotic brow. Warned by an inward presentiment that he was in a dangerous position, he changed the customary expression of his face, and substituting sheepishness for pride therein, he bent his knee, hung his head in order to escape the prelate's scrutiny, and pretended to await his benediction.

"His eminence blesses you mentally," said the abbé, after consulting the cardinal's eyes, and he motioned to the bearers to go forward.

The chair passed through the gateway and proceeded slowly along the avenue.

"I would like well to know," thought Michel, as he looked after the procession, "whether my instinct deceived me, or whether that man is the enemy of my family."

He was about to continue his journey, when he observed that Abbé Ninfo had not followed the cardinal, but was waiting until the last mule had passed, in order to lock the gate and restore the key to his pocket. This strange caretaking on the part of a man so close to the cardinal was well calculated to make an impression on him, and the keen, sidelong glance which that unattractive personage stealthily bestowed upon him impressed him even more.

"It is evident that I am already watched in this unhappy country," he thought; "and that my father did not dream of the enmities against which he warned me to be on my guard."

The abbé motioned to him to come to the gate just as he withdrew the key. Michel, persuaded that he must play his part more carefully than ever, approached with an air of humility.

"Here, my boy," said the abbé, offering him a small

coin, "here is something with which to refresh yourself at the first tavern, for you seem to be very much fatigued."

Michel repressed a thrill of indignation. He accepted the insult, put out his hand and thanked the abbé humbly; then he ventured to say:

"I am grieved that his eminence did not deign to give me his blessing."

This well-acted bathos dispelled the abbe's suspicions.

"Console yourself, my child," he said, in a nonchalant tone; "Divine Providence has been pleased to deprive our holy cardinal of the use of his limbs. Paralysis permits him to bless the faithful only with his mind and heart."

"May God cure and preserve him!" rejoined Michel; and he went his way, very certain now that he was not mistaken, and that he had had a lucky escape from a perilous meeting.

He had not taken ten steps down the hill-side when, as he turned a corner, he found himself face to face with a man who was close upon him before either of them recognized the other, so little did they expect to meet at that moment. Suddenly they both cried out at once and clung together in a passionate embrace. Michel was in his father's arms.

"O my child! my dear child! you, in this place!" cried Pier-Angelo. "What joy and what anxiety for me! But joy carries the day and makes me braver in spirit than I was a moment since. I was thinking of you and saying to myself: 'It is lucky that Michel is not here, for our affairs might well become serious.'—But here you are, and I cannot help being the happiest of men."

"Never fear, father," Michel replied; "I became prudent as soon as I set my foot on my native soil. I have just met our enemy face to face; he questioned me, and I lied in a way to do your heart good."

Pier-Angelo turned pale.—"Who? who?" he ex claimed; "the cardinal?"

"Yes, the cardinal in person, the paralytic in his grea gilt box. It must be the famous Prince Hieronymo, wh was the terror of my childhood, and who seemed to m all the more terrible because I did not know the cause o my fear. Well, dear father, I assure you that even if h still has the will to do harm, he has not the power, for a varieties of infirmity seem to have conspired together - crush him. I will tell you of our interview; but tell m first of my sister, and let us go at once and surprise her.

"No, Michel, no, the most important thing is for y to tell me how you happened to see the cardinal so clos Let us go into this clump of trees; I am not at all eas in my mind. Tell me, tell me quickly! He spoke t you, you say? Is it certain that he spoke?"

"Let me reassure you, father, he cannot speak."

"Are you sure of it? You told me that he questioned you."

"I was questioned in his behalf, I suppose; but, as I observed everything with perfect coolness, and as that caricature of an abbé who acts as his interpreter is too thin to conceal the whole interior of the chair, I saw plainly that his eminence spoke with his eyes only. Moreover, his eminence is stone deaf, for when I told my age, which the abbé asked me for some unknown rea son, I saw the abbé lean toward monsignore and hold up his ten fingers twice over, and then the thumb of his right hand."

"Dumb, helpless, and deaf to boot! I breathe again But how old did you say you were? Twenty-one?"

"You told me to lie as soon as I set foot in Sicily."

"It is well, my child; Heaven aided and inspired yo in that encounter."

"I think so, but I should be much more certain of it if you would tell me how the cardinal can be interested to know whether I am eighteen or twenty-one."

"That question cannot interest him in any way," said Pier-Angelo, with a smile. "But I am overjoyed to find that you remembered my advice and that you have suddenly acquired this prudence, of which I didn't believe you to be capable. But tell me again, what did Abbé Ninfo—for it must have been he, I am sure; was he very ugly?"

"Frightful; he squints and has a flat nose."

"That's the man! What else did he ask you? your name, or your province?"

"No, no other direct question, except as to my age, and my brilliant reply to that seemed to satisfy him so entirely that he turned his back, promising me his eminence's blessing."

"And his eminence didn't give it to you? he didn't raise his hand?"

"The abbé himself told me a little later that his eminence was entirely deprived of the use of his limbs."

"What! that man spoke to you again? that fiend of hell came back to you?"

As he spoke, Pier-Angelo scratched the back of his neck, the only spot on his head where his restless hand could find any hair. It was a sign with him of great perturbation of spirit.

IV

MYSTE

When Michel had told the
the most trivial detail, and Pie
applauded his hypocrisy, the y

"Now, father, pray tell me
live here, without a mask an
without being molested, whe
my arrival, must resort to st
guard?"

Pier-Angelo seemed to hes
plied:

"Why, it is a very simple
charged with being a conspira
prison, and probably escaped
formal prosecution had already
forgotten, and although the c
my name and my face at the
have changed greatly, or else
paired, for he has seen me her
name mentioned, without re
the faintest indication that he
was a test which I was resolv
moned by Abbé Ninfo to work
I went there boldly, after ta
Mila's safety in case I should
process. The cardinal saw me
Abbé Ninfo knows nothing ab

all events I was, free from anxiety on my own account, and was just about to write you to come and see me, when it began to be rumored in the city, a few days ago, that his eminence was visibly improved, so much so that he was going to pass some time at his country house at Ficarazzi yonder; you can see the palace from here, on the hillside."

"Then the villa a few steps away, where I just saw the cardinal enter, is not his own residence?"

"No; it belongs to his niece, Princess Agatha. Doubtless he thought that he would make a détour and call upon her as he passed; but this same visit worries me. I know that she was not expecting it—that she had made no preparations to receive her uncle. He must have wanted to give her an unpleasant surprise, for he surely knows that there is no reason whatever why she should be fond of him. I greatly fear that this is a cloak for some wicked design. In any event, this sudden activity on the part of a man who, for a whole year, has only moved about in a wheeled chair up and down a gallery in his city palace, gives me food for thought, and I say that we must pay close attention to everything now."

"But after all, father, all this does not tell me what danger there can be for me personally! I was barely six months old, I believe, when I left Sicily; I fancy that I was not implicated in the conspiracy in which you were involved?"

"No, of course not; but new-comers are watched. Every man of the people, young, intelligent and from across the strait, is assumed to be dangerous, permeated with the new ideas. A single word from your lips, spoken in presence of a spy, or extorted from you by an informer, would be enough to put you in prison; and when I went to claim you as my son, it would be vastly

worse if that wicked cardin
restored to health and to t
he might remember that I w
would apply to us, by wa
'Like father, like son.' No

"Yes, father, I will be p

"That is not enough. I
cardinal's state of health.
enter Catania until I know

"But what will you do t

"I will remain in hiding
seen the cardinal and his
It won't be long. If it is t
he will not have a long i
soon as we no longer run t
we will go to the Palmaros
now. I will conceal you i
and consult the princess."

"Is the princess in your

"She is my most powerf
She employs me a great de
her, we shall not be persec

"Oh! father, was it sh
which enabled me to pay m

"Lent it my boy, len
that you would not accep
much work that I can pay

"You may say: 'Soon,
come to pay my debt to y
purpose."

"What, my dear child
have you earned some mo

"Alas! no. I am no
enough known to earn m

know enough to paint frescoes for decoration. We will work together, my dear father, and I shall never again have to blush to think that I am leading the life of an artist, while you are wearing out your strength to gratify my misplaced tastes."

"Are you in earnest, Michel?" cried the old man. "You really mean to be a workman?"

"I am fully determined upon it. I have sold my canvases, my engravings, my books. I have given up my lodgings, thanked my teacher, bade farewell to friends, to Rome, to glory. It was a little hard," added Michel, feeling that his eyes were filling with tears; "but embrace me, father; tell me that you are content with your son, and I shall be proud of what I have done!"

"Embrace me, my dear boy!" replied the old decorator, pressing his son to his heart, and blending his own tears with his. "It is a fine thing, a noble thing that you have done, and God will reward you abundantly for it, I promise you. I accept your sacrifice, but let us understand each other: it is for a time only, for a time which we will make as short as possible by working rapidly to pay our debt. The experience will be useful to you, and your genius will grow instead of being extinguished. Between us, thanks to the excellent princess, who will pay us well, we shall soon have earned money enough for you to return to your real painting, without remorse and without imposing any privation on me. That is agreed. Now let us speak of your sister. She is a perfect prodigy of wit, that little girl. And how she has grown and how beautiful she is! so beautiful that it's enough to frighten a poor devil of a father like me."

"I propose to remain a workman," said Michel, "for with a modest but sure livelihood I can succeed in es-

tablishing my sister in l
dear angel! Think of
ings! And I, poor wret
to her and was forced to
rible, yes, detestable, t
one has poor relations!

"We will speak of th
revive your taste for yo
I hear the gate creaking-
let us not show ourselve
down on our right. Yo
himself with a key that
very disturbing too, to
safe in her own house, th
violate her privacy unex
suspect her, since they

"But of what can the

"Why, suppose it we
they persecute! You
prudent, and in any ev
portance of what I am
ready that the Palmar
court of Naples; that
family, Princess Agath
dinal, was the wickede
the enemy of his fath
compatriots; and that,
who go over to the side
like those who sell them
but he did it from amb
neering, in short, from
his blood and caused h
terrifying, tormenting,
was omnipotent in th

until it pleased God to rid us of him, he inflicted all the harm he possibly could upon the patriotic nobles and the poor devils who loved their country. His brother continued that wrong-doing; but now he is going, too; and if the dying lamp still casts a faint gleam, it is simply a proof that it is dying. Then all the clientage of the Palmarosas, among the people of Catania, and especially in the suburb where we live, will be able to breathe freely. There are no more males in the family, and all the vast property, of which the cardinal still has the income of a large part, will fall into the hands of a single heiress, Princess Agatha. She is as good as her relations have been bad, and her heart is in the right place. She is Sicilian to the marrow and detests the Neapolitans! She will have great influence when she is entirely in control of her property and her acts. If God would permit her to marry and take into her house some worthy nobleman as right-minded as she, that would change the tone of the administration somewhat, and better our lot!"

"Is the princess a young woman?"

"Yes, still young, and might marry as well as not; but she has always refused to do it thus far, in the fear, so far as I can understand, that she would not be free to choose for herself.—But here we are close to the park," added Pier-Angelo; "we may meet somebody, so let us talk of indifferent matters only. I urge you, my child, to use here nothing but the Sicilian dialect, which we very wisely used at Rome so long. You have not forgotten your native language, I trust, since we parted?"

"No, indeed," replied Michel.

And he began to talk Sicilian with great volubility, to convince his father that there was nothing about him to indicate the foreigner.

"That is very good," s
not the slightest accent."

They had made a détou
gate at a considerable dista
had encountered Monsigno
open and the numerous m
that many men, horses, and
and out.

"You will see here a gre
to the ordinary habits of t
painter to his son. "I will
say nothing yet, that is t
about you too much, nor ha
comer. And, first of all, hi
the rocks near the waterfall
Rub your shoes in the grass
a traveller. Why, I belie
hurt?"

"Nothing, nothing, a litt

"I am going to take you
without being disturbed by

Pier-Angelo made several
his son through shady paths
palace without meeting an
great deal of noise, which i
They entered a corridor on
rapidly by an enormous roo
materials of all sorts, assem
hensible purpose. The me
so great an uproar that the
his father. Michel had no
saw. His father had instru
by step, and he walked so f
utterly exhausted as he w

pace with him in the narrow halls and steep stairways.

Their journey through that labyrinth of secret passages seemed very long to Michel. At last Pier-Angelo took a key from his pocket and opened a small door on a dark corridor. Thereupon they found themselves in a long gallery, adorned with statues and pictures. But the blinds were drawn everywhere, and it was so dark that Michel could distinguish nothing.

"You can take a nap here," said his father, after he had carefully locked the little door and removed the key; "I am going to leave you here; I will return as soon as possible, and then I will tell you what we are to do."

He walked the whole length of the gallery, and, raising a portière embroidered with armorial bearings, pulled a bell-cord. In a few seconds a voice answered inside, and a dialogue followed, in so low a tone, that Michel could not hear a word. At last, a mysterious door was partly opened, and Pier-Angelo disappeared, leaving his son in the darkness, chill, and silence of that great empty room.

At times, however, the echoing voices of the men at work below, the sound of the saw and the hammer, snatches of song, laughter, and oaths reached his ears. But the noises gradually died away as darkness approached, and, after two hours, the most absolute silence reigned in that unfamiliar abode in which Michel found himself imprisoned, dying of hunger and weariness.

Those two hours of suspense would have seemed very long to him if sleep had not come to his aid. Although his eyes had become accustomed to the darkness of the gallery, he made no attempt to inspect the objects of art which it contained. He had dropped upon a rug, and fell into a sort of lethargy, interrupted sometimes by the

tumult below, and the u
sleeping in a strange pla
followed by the cessatio

But a strange cry, wh
the rose-shaped opening
ventilation, woke him a
his head and fancied t
ceiling. The figures pa
an instant. Another c
peculiar that Michel wa
the lowest depths of h
Then the light vanished
came so intense that he

Another quarter of an
excited by what had jus
to sleep again. He fe
danger which he could
the thought that he him
assist him. He examin
all securely locked. H
after all, it was a wom
he could not understan
between that cry and h

At last the mysterio
appeared, carrying a
parted a fantastic appe
it fell one after another
he said in a low voice :
in his dotage, and Abbé
The princess, for whom
while, because she had
that we should make n
thinks that that would
your return without an

to your sister, who is undoubtedly anxious because I am so late. But we have quite a little walk, and I suppose you are dying of hunger and thirst. The steward of the household, who is very kind to me, told me to take you to a little buttery, where we shall find something to eat."

Michel followed his father to a room which had on one side a glass door with a curtain covering the glass outside. This room, which was in no wise remarkable, was lighted by several candles, a fact which astonished Michel somewhat. Pier-Angelo, observing his surprise, said that it was a room where the princess's first lady's-maid came every night to superintend the preparation of her mistress's supper. With that he unceremoniously began to open cupboards and take out cold meats, preserves, wine, fruit, and innumerable delicacies which he placed helter-skelter on the table, laughing at each new discovery he made in those inexhaustible cupboards—all to the unbounded amazement of Michel, who failed to recognize his father's customary discretion and pride.

V

THE CASINO

"Well," said Pier-Angelo, "don't you propose to help me? You sit there with your arms folded and allow your father to wait on you! Do at least take the trouble to eat and drink yourself!"

"Excuse me, dear father, you seem to me to do the honors of the house with a self-possession which I admire,

but which I should not
me to be very much at

"I am more comforta
Pier-Angelo, nibbling a
ing the other wing to hi
you such suppers often
without false shame ;
thorized me to do this.'

"The majordomo is
like all the others, and
selves comfortable at
me, father, but this su
petite has all disappear
ing the princess's supp
with delicious sweetn
mouths, nor even for
domo."

"Well, if I must te
princess herself who b
is not hungry to-night
have some reluctance

"Your princess is
"and shows a most e
spect to me! I confes
her lackeys. But, fa
of the house, and a n
be no more fastidious
to it. But how did it
me that petty annoya

"Because I spoke
larly interested in me,
you, and, when she
declared that she wo
she would find an ar

short, that she would show you all the consideration you could possibly desire."

"She is a very generous and very thoughtful lady," rejoined Michel, with a sigh, "but I will not abuse her good-nature. I should blush to be treated as an artist, side by side with my father the artisan. No, no, I am an artisan myself, neither more nor less. I prefer to be treated like my fellows, and if I eat here to-night, I propose to eat to-morrow where my father eats."

"It is well, Michel; those are noble sentiments. I drink your health! This Syracuse wine gives me courage, and makes the cardinal seem no more formidable than a mummy to me! But what are you looking at so intently?"

"It seems to me that that curtain behind the glass keeps moving. There is certainly some prying servant there who doesn't like to see us eating such a delicious supper in his place. Ah! it will be very disagreeable to have to deal with those people all the time! They must be carefully handled, of course, for they can do us an ill turn with their masters, and deprive an honest artisan, who happens to offend them, of a good customer."

"That is true, generally speaking, but there is nothing of the sort to be feared here. I have the princess's confidence; I deal with her directly and without any orders from the majordomo. And, then, her servants are excellent fellows. Come, eat in peace, and don't keep looking at that curtain, which the wind is blowing."

"I assure you, father, that it isn't the wind, unless Zephyr has a pretty little white hand with a diamond ring on the finger."

"In that case it must be the princess's first lady's-maid. She must have heard me tell her mistress that you were a well-favored youth, and she is curious to see

you. Sit round this way,
curiosity."

"I am much more anxious
than to be seen by her ladys
have eaten my fill; let us g

"I will not go until I hav
excellent wine for courage a
again, Michel! I am so ha
would get drunk if I had th

"And I am happy too, fath
so when we are at home wit
so much at ease as you do in
seems to me that I am watch
afraid of me. There is a sile
do not seem natural to me.
show themselves as they do
stealthy in our movements,
watched. Anywhere else I
to see what there is behind t
in the gallery, I had a terribl
by a cry, such a cry as I nev

"A cry, really? How does
ing of the sort, although I
same part of the palace? Y

"No! no! I heard it twice
so vibrating, so peculiar that
think of it."

"Ah! that is just like yo
recognize you, Michel; it de
afraid that you had become
I am sorry, for the sake of yo
to tell you what I think abou
ness's first lady's-maid mus
mouse as she passed throug

surround the great gallery of paintings. Whenever she sees one of those creatures, she utters frightful shrieks, and I take the liberty of laughing at her."

This prosaic explanation annoyed the young artist a little. He hurried his father, who was inclined to forget himself over the Syracuse wine, and hair an nour later he was in his sister's arms.

The next day Michelangelo Lavoratori was installed with his father at the Palmarosa palace, to work industriously there the rest of the week. The work in progress was the decoration of the enormous ball-room constructed of wood and canvas for the occasion, adjoining the peristyle of that beautiful country-seat, and opening on the gardens on every side. The princess, who ordinarily lived in strict retirement, was about to give a magnificent fête, in which all the wealthy and noble inhabitants of Catania and of the neighboring villas were to take part. Her reason for this departure from her usual mode of life was as follows:

Every year the first society of that neighborhood cooperated to give a subscription ball for the benefit of the poor, and each proprietor of a spacious house, whether in the city or the country, was supposed to lend it in his turn, and to pay a portion of the expenses of the fête when the circumstances would permit.

Although the princess was exceedingly charitable, her taste for seclusion had led her to defer offering her palace; but her turn had come at last. She had most generously assumed the whole burden of the fête, agreeing to pay all the expenses of the ball, including the decorations of the ball-room, music, etc. By reason of her generosity, the sum realized for the poor promised to be quite handsome, and, as the Villa Palmarosa was the most superb residence in the province, and all the prep-

arations were on a ma
to be the most brilliant

The house was full o
a fortnight on the ball
bagallo the majordomo
matters, and under the
Angelo Lavoratori, wh
well known and high
ince.

On the first day, M
resigned to his lot, ma
his father and the ap
probation was confine
morning Pier-Angelo
wished him to underta
on the ceiling and ca
selection and size of
cretion; he was requ
to have confidence i
quire the care and
opened a wide field
realized that he was
upon which he was a
restraint, he had a m
more intoxicated than

His enthusiasm fo
creased when the p
his father, that, if
would be accepted a
Pier-Angelo for him;
connoisseurs, he sho

Thus Michel was o
event, and perhaps
played any talent a

A single apprehension, but a very weighty one, chilled his joy; the day for the ball was fixed, and it was not in the princess's power to postpone it. A week remained, only a week! For an experienced decorator that was enough, but for Michel, who had never done anything of the sort on a large scale, and who could not refrain from looking upon it as a matter in which his self-esteem was deeply involved, it was so little that he shuddered at the bare thought.

Luckily for him, having worked with his father in his boyhood, and having watched him work a thousand times since, the processes of water-color work were familiar to him, as well as the geometrical principles of decoration; but when he attempted to select his subjects, he was oppressed by the superabundance of his ideas, and the prodigality of his imagination put him on the rack. He passed two nights drawing his compositions, and all day on his scaffolding, adjusting them to the space at his command. He did not think of sleeping or eating, or even of improving his acquaintance with his young sister, until his work was definitely laid out. At last it was done, and he transferred his labors to the courtyard of an old ruined chapel in the centre of the park, where his canvas ceiling, forty feet long, was stretched on the ground. There, assisted by several zealous apprentices, who handed him his colors all ready for use, and walking barefooted over his mythological sky, he prayed to the muses to impart to his trembling hand the necessary skill and boldness; and at last, armed with a gigantic brush, which might fitly have been called a broom, he sketched his Olympus and worked with so much fire and hope that the canvas was ready to be put in place two days before the ball.

He had still to superintend its removal and installation,

and to retouch such part
that process. And the
who, having been delay
of wainscots and cornic

That week passed lik
moments of repose in w
delicious beyond words.
tiful inside as well as ou
gave one an idea of th
teeming in that countr
sweet, the vegetation s
and swift, that art has l
land around the palace
and vast fields of ashe
the image of desolation
those horrors add to t
volcanic flames have s

Villa Palmarosa, situ
rugged summit was ex
existed for centuries an
been privileged to cont
was very old, of a grac
from Saracen models.
cealed the façade of th
contrast to the dark col
upper floors. Within,
ing. While all was up
floor, all was tranquill
above, where the prin
entered that silent po
room with the glass d
father on the first ev
special and mysterious
and if the curtain mo

slight that Michel could not be certain that he had inspired a romantic passion in the first lady's-maid's breast.

The palace being built against the cliff, the princess's apartments were on a level with terraces embellished with flower-beds and fountains; and by descending a narrow flight of steps, boldly cut in the lava, one could reach by that means the park and the open country. Once Michel wandered into those Babylonian flower-gardens suspended over a terrifying abyss. He saw the windows of the princess's boudoir, which was two hundred feet above the main entrance of the palace, and yet she could go out of doors to walk without descending a single step. Such boldness of conception and such charm in the construction of a dwelling made him giddy both physically and mentally. But he never saw the queen of that enchanted abode. At the times when he went up to her apartments she was taking a siesta or receiving visits from her intimate friends in the salons on the second floor.

This Sicilian custom of living on the upper floors, to enjoy the fresher air and more perfect quiet, is found in several Italian cities. These private apartments, generally small and quiet, are sometimes called the *Casino*, and, with their private gardens, form, as it were, a distinct dwelling above the main palace. This of which we are speaking was set back from the front and side walls of the lower building by the width of a very broad terrace, so that it was concealed, and, as it were, isolated. At the back it formed a building of a single story, on the level of the flower-garden, since the lower edifice was built against the cliff. Viewing it from that side, one would have said that a stream of lava had flowed against the palace and hardened there, and had blotted out one whole side of it up to the level of the Casino. But the villa had been constructed in that way to avoid danger from fresh

eruptions. Looking at
would have taken it for
top of a rock. Not unt
mass of volcanic débri
palace, consisting of
another, and climbing

Under any other ci
been curious to know
lovely and gracious, w
inhabit so noble an abo
by the hurried work w
paid little heed to othe

He felt so fatigued w
for an instant, that h
drowsiness in order no
an hour. Indeed, he
companions might aba
of rest by stealth in t
father would lock him
one ever set foot. Tw
to go and pass the
though his house was
the villa, and he cons
a bed for him in the p
wretched hovel wher
glass, he neither saw
took place about hin
his sister and telling
he had no time to scr

The day before th
mained to give a last
work. He determin
stroll about the city
service. He soon le

churches, squares, and buildings. Lastly, his father introduced him to several of his friends and relations, who welcomed him cordially, and with whom he strove to be amiable. But the contrast between that environment and the society he had frequented at Rome made him sad in spite of himself, and he retired early, longing for the morrow; for, in presence of his work, and under the spell of the noble edifice in which he labored, he forgot that he was of the common people, and remembered only that he was an artist.

At last that day of hope and dread arrived, the day on which Michel's work was to be applauded or ridiculed by the élite of Sicilian society.

VI

THE STAIRCASE

"What! no farther advanced than this?" cried the majordomo, in despair, rushing in among the workmen. "Great God! what are you thinking of? The clock will strike seven in a moment; at eight the carriages will begin to arrive, and half of this room is not yet draped!"

As this apostrophe was addressed to no person in particular, no one replied, and the workmen continued to work with more or less speed, each according to the measure of his strength and his skill.

"Room, room for the flowers!" cried the controller of that notable branch of the establishment. "Put a hundred boxes of camellias in rows along the benches!"

"How do you expect to arrange your boxes of flow
before the carpets are down?" queried Master Bar
gallo, with a profound sigh.

"And where do you expect me to put my boxes a
flower-pots?" retorted the head gardener. "W
haven't your upholsterers finished their work?"

"Ah! there you are! why haven't they?" said
other, in a tone of intense indignation.

"Room! room for my ladders!" cried another voi
"the orders are that everything must be lighted at ei
o'clock sharp, and that doesn't give me any too mu
time to light so many chandeliers. Room, room
say!"

"Painters, take away your ladders," cried the up
sterers, in their turn; "we can do nothing as long
you are in the way."

"Such confusion, such an uproar, it's a second Tow
of Babel," muttered the majordomo, wiping his bro
"I did all that I could to see that everything was done
the proper time; I warned everyone more than a h
dred times; and here you are, all in a muddle, disput
the ground with one another, in one another's way,
making no progress at all. It is hopeless! it is
gusting!"

"Whose fault is it?" said the man with the flowe
"Can I put my wreaths on bare walls and my flow
pots on rough boards?"

"And can I climb up to the ceiling," said the man w
the candles, "if my ladders are taken away to lay c
pets? Do you take my men for bats, do you want
to make thirty honest fellows break their necks?"

"How do you expect my men to lay their carpet
said the chief upholsterer, in his turn, "if the paint
don't take away their ladders?"

"And how do you expect our ladders to be taken away if we are still on them?" shouted one of the painters.

"The fault is all yours, you daubers!" cried the frantic majordomo; "or, rather, your master is the only culprit," he added, noticing that the young man whom he addressed glared fiercely at him at the epithet of dauber. "It's that old madman of a Pier-Angelo, who is not even here to direct you, I'll wager. Where can he be? At the nearest wineshop, I'll stake my head!"

A voice, still full and resonant, broke forth at the highest point of the ceiling with the refrain of an old ballad, and, on looking up, the wrathful majordomo saw the glistening bald head of the decorator-in-chief. Evidently the old man was laughing at the majordomo, and, being master of the field, proposed to put the finishing touches to his work at his leisure.

"Pier-Angelo, my friend," said the other, "you are making sport of us! That is too bad of you. You act like an old spoiled child, as you are; but we shall lose patience at last. This is no time to laugh and sing your drinking-songs."

Pier-Angelo did not deign to reply; he simply shrugged his shoulders as he talked with his son, who was even higher up than he, shading the dress of a dancing-girl of Herculaneum, who swam in a blue canvas sky.

"There are enough figures, enough folds and shading!" cried the majordomo, beside himself. "Who in the devil will ever look up there, to see if there's anything wrong with your divinities in the firmament? The general effect is there, and that's all that is necessary. Come, come down, you old fox, or I'll shake the ladder you are standing on."

"If you touch my father's ladder," exclaimed young

Michel, in a voice of
this chandelier. No j
or you will be sorry f

"Let him talk, and
Pier-Angelo, calmly.
waste your breath in

"Go down, father,
"I am afraid that in t
fall; I shall finish in
you, if you expect me

Pier-Angelo descend
had lost, at sixty yea
of youth, but in order
quired to complete his

"What folly, what
the old man. "You
vases as if they wer
whereas they will be
morrow, and will have
ures for the next fêt
Who will pay the sligl

"Not you; everybod
painter, contemptuousl

"Hush, Michel, and
father. "Everyone t
can," he added, lookin
some who take pride
labors! Come! the u
a hammer and some n
layed you, it's no more

"Always a good com
ers, handing the old pa
ter Pier-Angelo, let art
One must be

"Oh! yes," grumbled Barbagallo, who, contrary to his customary reserved and courteous habit, was in a savage humor that evening; "that's the way everybody pays court to the obstinate old fool, and he doesn't care a fig how much trouble he makes for others."

"Instead of grumbling, you ought to help at the nailing, or by lighting the candles," said Pier-Angelo, with a mocking air. "But, psha! you are afraid you might spoil your satin breeches and tear your ruffles."

"Master Pier-Angelo, you are altogether too familiar, and I swear that I will never employ you after to-day."

"God grant it!" retorted the other with his accustomed phlegm, accompanying himself with sturdy, measured blows of the hammer upon the nails which he drove in quick succession; "but, on the very next occasion, you will come and implore me, and say that nothing can be done without me; and I, as usual, shall forgive your impertinence."

"Well!" said the majordomo to Michel, as he came slowly down his ladder, "is it done at last? That is very fortunate! Quick! quick! help the upholsterers, or the gardeners, or the lamplighters. Do something to make up for lost time."

Michel eyed the majordomo with a haughty air. He had so entirely forgotten even the idea of becoming a mere workman, that he could not imagine how that subordinate could venture to order him to take part in tasks unconnected with his special duties; but, just as he was about to make a sharp retort, he heard his father's voice calling him.

"Come, Michel, bring us some nails here, and help these good fellows, who won't finish in time without us."

"Nothing can be fairer," the young man replied. "I may not be very skilful at that work, but I have good

strong arms for s
Tell me, you fello
"Good!" excla
upholsterer, outspo
next door to the La
a good comrade lik
and you will be lov
because you had st
clined to be a littl
about the city in a
You have a very
blame you for bein
"Where would b
ing industriously be
to be ambitious?"
"I like the fran
who wishes to be a
fection."
"Am I hated, pr
arrived, and where
"It is your own
family is well know
teemed; and the v
eyes fixed on you i
think you a comely
So far as I am able
you have sketched
vulgar daubs. Your
reason why you sh
still a child, you are
have almost no bea
an opportunity to f
When you have suf
of your condition i

will forgive you for carrying your head high and swaying from your hips up as you cross the street, with your cap over one ear. Otherwise we shall tell you that you are trying to impose on us, and that if you are not an artisan, but an artist, you had better ride in a carriage and not look the young men of your own rank in the face; for, you see, your father is a workman like us; he has talent in his line, and it may be more difficult to paint flowers, fruit, and birds on a cornice than to hang draperies at a window and arrange colors to harmonize in furnishing a room. But the difference isn't so great that we are not cousins-german in trade. I do not think that I am any better than the carpenter or mason; why do you think yourself above me?"

"I have no such thought," Michel replied; "God preserve me from it!"

"In that case, why didn't you come to our artisans' ball last night? I know that your cousin Vincenzo wanted to bring you, and you refused."

"Do not form a bad opinion of me for that, my friend; it may be that I am of a melancholy and unsociable temperament."

"I don't believe it. Your face says the contrary. Forgive me for speaking to you without ceremony; it is because I like you that I reproach you in this way. But our carpet is all nailed here; we must go somewhere else."

"Two or three of you to each chandelier!" cried the head lamplighter to his men; "you will never finish if you scatter so!"

"I say! I am all alone!" cried Visconti, one of the lighters, a stout fellow and fond of the bottle, who, having a little wine in his brain already, did not hold the lighted match within two inches of the candle. Michel, impressed

by the lesson Magn
the chandelier and

"Ah! that is righ
a good fellow, and
pays well, and mo
themselves in her
supper for us afte
and there'll be no l
a little on account

"And so you are
with a smile.

"Perhaps your
two or three hour
will come to supp
Your father will sin
good for a laugh.
at table at once!

"Make room, ma
gold lace on all the
coming to see if ev
aside! Don't shak
I say! you lighters
away your tools, m

"Well," said the
peace, I trust, you
are late, at least act
responsible for the
very sorry for you.
tify you. Ah! Mas
excuse for coming t

These words rea
pride reawoke in his
beg for compliment
able to him. If he

princess, he could fairly say that he had made no attempt to see her. He was not one of those who run eagerly at the heels of a wealthy and powerful person, to feast that person's eyes with the spectacle of puerile and servile admiration. But this time he stooped as he stood on the stool, seeking with his eyes that haughty personage who, according to Master Barbagallo, would in a moment humiliate an assemblage of intelligent and willing mechanics with a gesture or a word. He remained in that position, considerably above the level of the crowd, in order to see better, but all ready to jump down, rush to his old father's side, and answer for him if, in a spasm of too great affability, the heedless old man should allow himself to be insulted.

The vast apartment which they were hastening to complete was nothing more than an immense garden terrace, covered on the outside with such a wilderness of foliage, garlands and streamers, that one might have taken it for an enormous bower after the style of Watteau. Within, movable floors had been laid on the gravel. Three great marble fountains, decorated with mythological characters, were not at all in the way in that extemporized ball-room, but formed its most beautiful decoration. There was sufficient room to promenade and to dance between those graceful piles. They discharged their jets of limpid water into veritable thickets of flowers, beneath the resplendent glare of the great chandeliers, which spangled them with sparks of light. Benches, arranged as in an ancient amphitheatre, dotted with rose-bushes here and there, provided numerous seats for the guests and did not impede the circulation.

The ceiling was so high that the main stairway of the palace, an admirable piece of architecture, adorned with antique statues and jasper urns of the most beautiful pat-

terns, was wholly
marble stairs were
and the lackeys w
back the crowd o
about the foot of t
held his peace in a

The workmen,
genuous and respe
in others, all fixed
the top of the stai
beating fast, but i
patience. "Who
wealthy mortals,"
proudly over the
hands construct fo
hardly be worthy
of such a temple, t
Oh! insolence, fa
the woman who is
a woman of narro
these bold, strong

Michel had ask
cerning Princess A
those few questio
of late, in an abse
anyone introduce
induced by his w
thought that he w
some one prouder
and something lik

VII

A GLANCE

When the Princess of Palmarosa appeared at the top of the stairs, Michel thought that he saw before him a girl of fifteen, she was so lithe and slender in figure and in attitude; but, at each stair that she descended, he discovered an additional year upon her brow; and when he saw her near at hand, he concluded that she was about thirty. That did not prevent her from being beautiful; not resplendent and superb, but pure and sweet, like the bunch of white cyclamen she carried in her hand. She had a reputation for grace and charm rather than for beauty; for she had never been a coquette, and did not seek to create a sensation. Many much less beautiful women had kindled passions because they had chosen so to do. Princess Agatha had never furnished food for gossip, and if there had ever been any profound emotion in her life, society had never had any positive knowledge of it.

She was very charitable, indeed, it might be said that her only occupation was the distribution of alms; but it was done without parade or ostentation, and she was not called the mother of the poor. In a majority of cases the people whom she assisted did not know the source of the assistance they received. She was not a very regular attendant at church, although she did not avoid religious services. She had artistic tastes, and surrounded herself most discerningly with the most beautiful objects and the noblest minds. But she did not shine in the centre of

her social syste
connections or h
she preferred to
from apathy, fro
she had made it
There never wa
esteemed her, lo
her worth withou
her true worth?
been difficult to
great intellect.
bestowed upon
lutely reliable pe

All this could
one cast upon h
her descend the
aversion vanish
tain a feeling of
calm, and sweet
anger, to defy th
and splendid bea
of a great weight
had an instinctiv
she would have
spirit to be insulti
gazed at her wit
freshing fluid em
its way from her

She was richly
gown of a dull
small circle of di
hair, parted in b
Doubtless she co
coronet was a wo

ship, and did not weary her small, admirably poised head with a dragging weight. Her shoulders, half bare, had lost the interesting thinness of early youth, and had not yet attained the luxuriant rotundity of the third or fourth youth. There were still some delicate lines in her figure, and in her every movement a careless suppleness, which seemed to be unaware of its own existence and to pose for no one.

With the end of her fan she slowly waved aside the footman and the majordomo, who were exerting themselves to make room for her, and passed before them, stepping easily and without awkward haste over the boards and rolls of carpet which still lay in her path; and with a sort of heedlessness, humble or lordly, as you please, allowing the long folds of her beautiful white silk dress to drag in the dust left by the feet of the mechanics. With no sign of repugnance, perhaps without observing them, she brushed against the perspiring workmen, who could not step aside quickly enough. She passed through a group of gardeners, who were moving huge boxes, and did not seem to notice or to be disturbed by the danger of being crushed or wounded. She returned the salutations of those who saluted her, without the slightest assumption of superiority or patronage, and when she was in the midst of the swarm of men, boards, ladders, and canvas, she halted very calmly, looked about to see what was finished and what was not, and said in a mild and encouraging voice:

"Well, *gentlemen,* do you hope to have everything finished in time? We have barely half an hour."

"I will answer for everything, my dear princess," replied Pier-Angelo, approaching her with a cheerful air; "don't you see that I am putting my hand to everything?"

"In that cas
also upon ever
such a beautif
ingly pleased.
cuted with gre
pains you hav
this fête will r

"My son M
rejoined the o
permit me to p
and kiss the p
cess, you see

Michel did n
though the w
father had tou
means incline
well aware t
hand denotes
the prostrati
claim the for
other. He r
fecting to loo
possession.

Thereupon
because her
cordiality in
manners, or
hallucination
being by tha
a searching
very soul fr
ble affection
taken posse
Princess Ag

than any human words: "Come to my arms, come to my heart!"

Michel, bewildered, fascinated, beside himself, shuddered, turned pale, approached with an involuntary, convulsive movement, tremblingly took the princess's hand, and, as he was about to put it to his lips, raised his eyes once more to hers, thinking that he had been mistaken, and that he could in that way put an end to a dream that was at once painful and delicious. But those pure and limpid eyes expressed a love so absolute and so trustful that he lost his head, felt that his senses were leaving him, and fell as if crushed at the signora's feet.

When he recovered his presence of mind, the princess was already several steps away. She walked on, followed by Pier-Angelo, and when they were alone at the farther end of the room, they seemed to be discussing some detail of the fête. Michel was ashamed; his emotion rapidly vanished in face of the thought that he had presented to all his companions a spectacle of incredible weakness and presumption; but, as the princess's kind words had electrified them all, and as they had all resumed their labor with a sort of joyful frenzy, they sang and hammered, and bustled about him, and his adventure was a mere incident, lost, or at least not understood, in the crowd. Some had noticed, with a smile, that he bowed lower than he needed to do, and that it was apparently an aristocratic and gallant habit which he had brought from abroad with his haughty air and his fine clothes. Others thought that he had stumbled over a board when he was about to bow, and that his awkwardness had caused his confusion.

Magnani alone had watched him closely and half guessed the truth.

"Michel," he said, after a few moments, when their

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I propose to show myself worthy of it by justifying myself. I know nothing, I believe nothing, I think nothing of the princess. For the first time in my life I see so great a lady at close quarters, and ——. But why do you smile?"

"You stop to ask about my smile to avoid finishing your sentence. I will finish it for you. You find that a great lady is something divine, and you fall madly in love with her. You love grandeur! I understood that perfectly the first time I saw you."

"No, no!" cried Michel, "I have not fallen in love; I do not know this woman, and, as for her grandeur, I do not know in what it consists. You might as well say that I am in love with her palace, her dress, or her diamonds, for thus far I have seen no other signs of superiority, except excellent taste, in which we assist her materially, it seems to me, as well as her jeweller and her dressmaker."

"As you know nothing more of her, that is well said," rejoined Magnani; "but in that case will you explain to me why you nearly fainted when you kissed her hand?"

"Do you explain it to me, if you can; for my part, I have no idea. I knew that ladies had a way of using their eyes which was bolder than that of a courtesan, and at the same time more contemptuous than that of a nun. Yes, I had noticed that; and that blending of seduction and pride drove me wild when I happened, against my will, to touch elbows with any of them in a crowd. And that is why I hated great ladies. But this one has a glance which resembles no other woman's. I could not undertake to say whether it is voluptuous languor or good-humored torpor; but no woman ever looked at me so, and —— what can you expect, Magnani? I am young and impressionable, and it gave me the vertigo; that is

all. I am not intoxicated with vanity, I swear, for perfectly certain that she would have looked at y the same way if chance had placed your face befor instead of mine."

"I don't believe it," replied Magnani, pensively.

He had dropped his hammer and seated himself bench. He seemed to be struggling painfully to so problem.

"Ah! young men!" exclaimed old Pier-Angelo, passed them; "you are chattering and not work only the old men know how to work fast."

Touched by the rebuke, Michel hastened to assist father, after whispering to his new friend that they w resume their conversation later.

"Your best course," said Magnani, in an undert with a strange expression, "will be to think as little possible about it."

Michel loved his father fervently, and with good reas Pier-Angelo was a man of spirit, of courage, and of sou sense. An artist in his way, he followed the good old t ditions in his work, and was not irritated by the innov tions that he saw all about him. On the contrary, very quickly assimilated such progressive ideas as he w made to understand. He was an easy-going, jovial mort optimistic in general, tolerant in particular cases, almo never ascribing evil intentions, but never paltering wi them when it was no longer possible for him to enterta his generous illusions. A straightforward, simple, u selfish soul, content with little, entertained by every thing, loving work for himself, and money for others, th is to say, living from day to day, and unable to deny h neighbor anything.

Providence had given the impulsive Michel the onl guide he could ever have accepted; for that young m

was entirely different from his father in several respects. He was restless, suspicious, slightly egotistical, with a decided tendency toward ambition, instability and anger. And yet his also was a noble nature, because it was sincerely in love with the noble and the great, and surrendered enthusiastically when its confidence was justified. But it is beyond question that his temperament was less happy than it might have been, that his active and inquisitive intellect often fed upon itself; and that his sensitive and excitable mind sometimes made a desperate onslaught on the tranquillity of his heart.

If a rough hand, the heavy hand of a mechanic desperately bent upon money-making, or subject to all the jealous indignation peculiar to the republican spirit, had undertaken to mould young Michel's mobile nature and discontented mind, it would have driven them to exasperation and would speedily have shattered or destroyed them. The improvident and cheerful temper of Pier-Angelo had acted as a counterpoise and sedative upon his passionate instincts. He rarely talked the language of cold reason to him, and never thwarted his fickle inclinations. But the fearless heedlessness of certain natures has a sympathetic effect which makes us blush for our weaknesses, and acts upon us more powerfully by example, by precepts nobly and simply put in execution, than all the speeches and sermons in the world could do. It was by this means that Pier-Angelo, while seeming to accede to Michel's desires and caprices, still exerted the only ascendancy to which he could have been induced to submit.

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those who seemed well-disposed, and set to work. Michel performed prodigies in the way of assisting them; and in ten minutes, the task which it was said would take two hours was completed as if by magic.

"Michel," then said the old man, wiping his head, which was bald to the base of the skull, "I am satisfied with you, and I see that you are a good workman; which, in my eyes, is an indispensable qualification for any man who wishes to become a great artist. Everyone cannot work fast, and most of those who make haste do bad work. We must not despise them for that. In the ordinary course of affairs all work requires coolness, calculation, orderly management, foresight, in short, common sense—yes, even in loading a cart with stones, there are a thousand ways of going about it and only one right way. One man will take too many on his shovel, another not enough; one lifts his arm too high and throws the stones over the cart, another doesn't lift it high enough and throws them among the wheels. Have you never compared one thing with another and reflected, as you watched the simple work of the fields? Have you seen men digging? In that, as in everything else, there is one good workman to twenty bunglers. And who can say that the man who does as much work with the spade as four others, without tiring himself out and without losing a second, is not a superior man, who would do more difficult things admirably? Tell me, what do you think about it? For my part, I have always had that thought in my mind, and by watching the girls picking strawberries on the mountain, I can pick out the one who will best manage her house and bring up her children some day. Do you think I am talking nonsense? Answer me."

"I think that you are right, father," Michel replied,

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none the less. I wish I could write poetry in pure Tuscan; but I only know how to improvise in my Sicilian dialect, in which, provided you rhyme in *i* and *u*, you can always succeed in producing something that resembles poetry. If I could I would write a beautiful ballad about the love and modesty of a son who attributes to his old simpleton of a father all that he discovers about himself; a ballad! there is nothing in the world more perfect than a good ballad. I know a great many of them, but there are very few with which I am perfectly satisfied. I would like to be able to supply something that is lacking in them all. That reminds me that I shall have to sing to-night at supper. Hum! after swallowing such a lot of dust! but there will be plenty of good wine for the workmen to drink. Don't you mean to come? Evidently you don't like to drink with everybody. Perhaps you are right. They say that you are proud; but, on the other hand, you are sober and dignified. You must do what suits you. After all, it's of no use for you to talk, you will never be a simple mechanic like me, whatever you may do. You help me at my work now, and that is well done. But once our little debts are paid, you will return to Rome, for I propose that you shall continue the noble studies that attract you so."

"Ah! father, every word you say goes to my heart. Our little debts! it was I who contracted them, not only for useful studies, but for foolish diversions and insane, childish vanities. And when I think that each year I pass at Rome costs you the whole avails of your toil!"

"Even so! for whom should I earn money, if not for my son?"

"But you rob yourself!"

"Of nothing at all. I find friendship and confidence wherever I am employed; and except a little good wine,

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lance is drunk with joy. He carries off the prize, and congratulates himself on having had the courage to compete. But he who has broken several lances with no result goes away saying: 'My luck is bad; I will not try again.' And he too is pleased that he has profited by experience and has had the courage to read himself a salutary lesson. But the evening breeze dries the perspiration on my old forehead a little too quickly; I am going to the pantry to eat and drink. As there is nothing more for you to do here, you may as well get our tools together and go home."

"And when will you come home, father?"

"Ah! Michel, I don't know when or how! it will depend on how much I enjoy the supper. You know that I am very sober, generally speaking, and drink only to quench my thirst; but if they lead me on to laugh and sing, and chatter, I get excited and have paroxysms of merriment and poetic enthusiasm which carry me off to the moon; and then it's of no use to talk to me about going to bed. Don't be anxious about me. I shall not fall down in a corner, I am not a beastly sot; my drunkenness is that of brilliant minds, on the contrary, and I never act more reasonably than when I am a little mad; that is to say, I shall be at work again here at daylight tomorrow, to assist in undoing all we have done this week, and I shall be less tired than if I had passed the night in my bed."

"You must despise me for being unable to find in wine the superhuman strength that it gives you!"

"You have never cared to try!" cried the old man; and he added instantly: "and you have done well! because at your age it is an unnecessary stimulant. Ah! when I was young the lightest glance from a woman would have given me more strength than the whole of the prin-

cess's cellar would
night, my boy."

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duty to place my foresight, my activity, and my loyalty at the service of a woman whom I esteem as much as I esteem her? I have no need of her assistance as yet; but I have seen how she helps those who get into difficulty, and I know that she would dress my wounds with her own hands if I were wounded."

"Yes, yes, I know all about that," rejoined Michel, gloomily; "benevolence, charity, pity, alms-giving!"

"Come, come! Master Pier-Angelo," said a valet, who passed them at that moment, "it is time to change your clothes. Take off your apron, the guests are arriving; go to the dressing-room, or to the buffet first, if you like."

"True," said Pier-Angelo, "we are a little untidy to rub elbows with such beautiful gowns. Farewell, Michel, I am going to beautify myself. Go home and rest."

Michel glanced at his own clothes, which were soiled and torn in a thousand places. His pride returned; he slowly descended the steps leading to the main ball-room and walked across it, amid the resplendent groups which were beginning to appear. A young man who entered as Michel was going out jostled him roughly. Michel was on the point of flying into a rage; but he restrained himself when he saw that the young man in question was as distraught as he.

He was a youth of some twenty-five years, of small stature and with a most attractive face. And yet, both in his face and bearing there was something peculiar which attracted Michel's attention, although he could not explain to his own satisfaction why he should take an interest in the stranger. It is certain, however, that there must have been something unusual about him, for the door-keeper to whom he had handed his card of ad-

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other diadems of precious stones. However, he was not mistaken as to her identity, and he could not take his eyes from her.

The lady and gentleman who had noticed the arrival of the unknown young man walked away, and Michel heard other voices at his side.

"I have seen that face somewhere, I don't know where," said a lady.

A pale, lovely young woman, who was walking with the last speaker, exclaimed, in a tone which aroused Michel from his reverie:

"Ah! great God! what a resemblance!"

"Why! what is the matter, my dear?"

"Nothing; a memory, a resemblance; but it is not the same——"

"What are you talking about, pray?"

"I will tell you later. First of all, look at that man."

"That short young man? I certainly don't know him."

"Nor do I; but he bears a most appalling resemblance to a man who——"

Michel heard no more; the beautiful young woman had lowered her voice as she walked on.

Who could that man be who had just come in, and who already produced such a marked sensation? Michel looked at him and saw that he was retracing his steps as if he intended to go out; but he halted in front of him and said in a voice as soft as a woman's: "My friend, will you be kind enough to tell me which of all the ladies who are already here is Princess Agatha de Palmarosa?"

"I have no idea," replied Michel, impelled by an instinctive feeling of distrust and jealousy.

"Then you do not know her?" queried the stranger.

"No, signor," replied Michel, dryly.

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Michel had not
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He returned to h
bed; but he forgot

hair, the weight of which made his forehead hot, he saw a small flower fall. It was a white cyclamen blossom. How had it broken off and clung to his hair? There was no reason for much surprise or uneasiness. The place where he had worked and hustled about, gone hither and thither a thousand times, was so thickly strewn with flowers of all sorts.

But Michel did not remember that. He simply remembered the enormous bouquet of cyclamen which the Princess of Palmarosa carried when he had stooped tremblingly and kissed her hand. He put the flower to his lips; it exhaled an intoxicating odor. He took his head in both hands. It seemed to him that he was going mad.

IX

MILA

The mental disturbance which our young painter experienced at that moment was due to two causes, one an absurd sort of jealousy, which had taken possession of him like an attack of fever, with respect to Princess Agatha; the other, a feeling of disquiet, because he had failed to obtain that noble person's approval of his paintings. Of course it was not mere love of gain, the desire to be paid more or less handsomely, which worked upon him thus. So long as he had been engrossed by the fever of production, he had given very little thought to the subject of the signora's personal opinion; he had thought only of succeeding, of satisfying himself; then, having

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fear, she knows what is what. It is impossible that she should not be satisfied beyond what she expected." Michel had surrendered to that confidence without paying much heed to the question whether it was justified. He had said to himself that, even if the princess were not a connoisseur, there would soon be enough connoisseurs about her to guide her judgment.

Moreover, he was afraid of everybody now because he was afraid of the princess. She had looked at him in a way that had completely upset him; but she had said nothing to him; not a word of praise or encouragement had accompanied that glance, which was more than kind, it is true, but for that very reason incomprehensible. And suppose he had been mistaken touching the expression of her face! suppose that, when she thus fixed her lovely, joy-laden eyes upon him, she was thinking of some entirely different person—her lover, perhaps, for she must have a lover, whatever Magnani might say!

At the bare idea Michel felt faint and sick; he fancied that he saw the princess leaning on the arm of the fortunate mortal for whose sake she pretended to entertain no thought of marriage. They were glancing absently at the young painter's work, and smiling as they looked into each other's eyes, as if to say:

"What does it matter to us? nothing is beautiful, nothing exists for us, except ourselves."

Weary of suffering so entirely without reason, Michel thought to conquer and tranquillize himself by adopting a superb resolution.

"I will go to bed," he said to himself, "and sleep like a prince, like a hero, while people are criticising me, disputing and perhaps getting excited about me in yonder palace. To-morrow morning, father will come and wake me, and tell me whether I have won the laurel wreath

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flowers, gushing waters, diamonds with a bluish gleam; and with the things which seemed real, fanciful things were mingled as in a dream. Lovely dancing-girls of antique times, whom Michel had painted on the ceiling, stood forth gracefully from the canvas, and, raising their azure and purple tunics above their knees, glided through the crowd, and cast upon him as they passed lewd glances and mysterious smiles. Drunk with desire, he followed them, and lost them, and found them again, seizing one by her floating girdle, another by her transparent *peplum*, but exhausting himself in vain efforts, in vain entreaties, to detain them and give them substance.

Then a white female passed slowly and took sole possession of his vagrant passion. She stopped in front of him and gazed at him, at first with stony eyes, which gradually became animated and ended by flashing flames, whereby he felt that he was being consumed. Lying motionless at her feet, he saw her stoop over him. He fancied that he felt her breath upon his brow; but instantly the giddy band of Latin harlots entangled him in a network of multi-colored tunics and whirled him upward toward the ceiling. Then he found himself alone on his ladder, smeared with paint, covered with dirt, exhausted, gasping for breath, in a ghastly solitude, dimly lighted by a vague gleam of daylight. Silence hovered over the cold, deserted rooms; naught remained of his vision save a little broken flower, whose fragrance he had exhausted by inhaling it.

This hallucination became so painful that Michel, in terror, pushed the cyclamen away once more, thinking that there must be something soporific or poisonous in its exhalations. But he could not make up his mind to destroy it. He placed it in a glass of water and opened his window again.

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"And you mean
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vants, beggars and vagabonds, with a hare-brained creature like Nenna? You shall not do it, I forbid you!"

"Oh! you needn't put on those high and mighty paternal airs, my dear brother," retorted Mila, in an offended tone. "Do you suppose I am mad enough to listen to Nenna? I sent her away; she is a long way from here, and I was going to sleep again when I heard you walking about and talking. I thought father was with you; but I saw through the crack of the door that you were alone, and then ——"

"Then you came in here to chatter, in order to avoid going to sleep, eh?"

"It is true that I have no desire to go to bed so early, and father didn't forbid me to listen and look on from a distance at what is going on up there! Oh! how beautiful it must be! You can see much better from your window than from mine, Michel; do let me feast my eyes on that beautiful bright light!"

"No, little one. The wind is cool to-night, and you have almost no clothes on. I am going to shut the window and go to bed. Go and do the same; good-night."

"You are going to bed; and have just dressed yourself! what did you do it for, pray? Michel, you are deceiving me, you are going to see the ball, you are going in! I will bet that you are invited, and that you won't tell me so!"

"Invited! they don't invite people like us to such grand affairs, my poor dear! When we enter that palace, we go as workmen, not as friends."

"What difference does that make, so long as you're there? Then you are going? Oh! how I would like to be in your place!"

"Why, what is the meaning of this frantic desire to see this fête?"

"To see what is beautiful, Michel, isn't t
When you draw a beautiful figure, I take more
in looking at it, perhaps, than you do who drew

"But if you were there, it would be on cond
you were hidden in some hole, for if they saw y
would turn you out; you could not even show
much less dance!"

"Very true; but I should see the others d
that would be much."

"You are a child. Good-night."

"I see that you aren't willing to take me!"

"No, surely not; I can't. They would turn
and I should have to break the head of som
lackey for insulting you when you were on my

"What! isn't there some little corner no bi
your hand, where I could hide? I am so sma
Michel, I could get into your cupboard. Any
could take me to the door without taking me in,
would not be angry to know that I was there v

Michel preached a beautiful sermon to Mila c
ject of childish curiosity, and the violent instin
ing which she felt to intoxicate herself with th
of patrician grandeur. He forgot that he was
by the same longing, and that he was anxious
so that he might give way to it.

Mila listened to reason when Michel told h
was going to assist his father to overlook the
of the ball; but she heaved a deep sigh, none

"Well," she said, tearing herself away fro
dow, "it's no use to think any more about it.
it's my own fault; for if I had had any idea th
be so wild to go, I could very easily have ask
cess to invite me."

"Now you are going mad again, just as I t

were becoming reasonable, Mila! As if the princess could have invited you, even if she had taken it into her head to do it!"

"Why, of course she could; isn't she the mistress of her own house?"

"Even so! what would all those ancient dowagers, all those august blockheads say, if they should see little Mila, with her velvet jacket and striped skirt, dancing about among their noble dolls of daughters?"

"Let me tell you, that I might perhaps cut a better figure than all of them, young and old!"

"That is no reason."

"I know that; but the princess is a queen in her house, and I will bet that she will invite me to the first ball she chooses to give."

"You will ask her to, I suppose?"

"To be sure! I know her, and she is very fond of me; she is a friend of mine."

As she said this, Mila drew herself up and assumed an air of importance, so comical and so fascinating that Michel laughed and kissed her.

"I like to see, Mila," he said, "that you have no suspicion of anything. And why should I deceive you? You will lose soon enough the trustful illusions of your age of gold! But, since you know this beautiful princess so well, pray tell me something about her, my dear little sister; tell me how it happens that you are so intimately acquainted with her, without my knowing anything about it?"

"Aha! Michel, you are curious to know that, now! But since you have shown so little eagerness to question me, you will kindly wait a little longer, until it pleases me to answer you."

"So it's a secret, is it?"

"Perhaps! what do you care?"

"I care very little, in truth, to know an
soever concerning this princess. She has a
work there, she pays me, and I care little ab
else for the moment. But nothing that inter
Mila can be indifferent to me, nor should it b
me, in my opinion."

"Now you are flattering me to make me s
I will not speak, there! But I will show y
that will make you open your eyes. See,
say to this pretty thing?"

And Mila took from her bosom a locket su
large diamonds.

"They are fine stones," she said, "and
know how much money. Enough to provi
marriage portion if I chose to sell them; but
part with them, because they came from my b

"And that friend is the Princess of Palma

"Yes, Agatha Palmarosa; don't you see
engraved on the gold of the locket?"

"Yes, that is true! But what is there insid
less trinket?"

"Hair, lovely light chestnut hair, with a to
naturally curly, and so fine!" said the girl,
locket. "Isn't it soft and glossy?"

"That isn't the princess's, for hers is black

"So you have seen her, after all?"

"Yes, I just caught a glimpse of her. B
Mila, whose hair you wear against your he
such a valuable locket?"

"How inquisitive you are! you are blind an
like all inquisitive people. Don't you rec
Don't you remember where I got it?"

"No, indeed, I do not."

"Well, put it against yours and you will recognize it, although your head has grown a little darker in a year."

"Dear little sister! yes, I do remember now that you cut it from my head the day you left Rome—and you have kept it all this time!"

"I used to carry it in a little black bag. My friend Agatha asked of what saint I carried a relic in my scapulary, and when I told her that it was my darling and only brother's hair, she took it and said she would send it back to me the next day; and the next day she sent me by father this lovely locket filled with your hair. However, some of it was missing. The jeweller who put it inside either stole it or lost it."

"Lost it, that may be," said Michel, with a smile; "but as for stealing it! This hair has no value to anyone but you, Mila!"

X

PROBLEM

"But, after all, what is the source of this friendship of the princess for you," continued Michel, after a pause; "what have you ever done for her that she should make you such presents?"

"Nothing at all. Father, who is on excellent terms with her, took me to the palace one day to present me to her. She took a fancy to me; she paid me all sorts of attentions; she asked me for my friendship, and I promised it and gave it to her at once. I passed the day all

alone with her, walking about her villa and the gard
Since then I go there when I choose, and I am alw
sure of being well received."

"And you go often?"

"I have never been but twice, for it isn't long sir
first knew her. I know that the palace has been tu
upside down this last week by the preparations fo
ball, and I was afraid of being in poor Agatha's
when, of course, she had a thousand things to do.
shall go in two or three days."

"So that is the whole of the mystery, is it? Why
you need so much urging to tell it?"

"Oh! because the princess said to me when I ca
away: 'Mila, please don't tell anyone about the deli
ful day we have passed together and the friendship
have formed. I have my reasons for asking you to kee
secret. You shall know them later, and I know tha
can rely on your promise if you will give it to me.'—
you can imagine, Michel, I did not refuse it."

"Very good; but you are breaking your word now

"No, I am not. You are not *anybody* to me, and
course, the princess didn't suppose I would have
secrets from my father or my brother."

"Does my father know all this, then?"

"Certainly, I told him about it at once."

"And he was neither surprised nor disturbed by
whim of the princess?"

"Why surprised, please? It is your surprise tha
very strange and a little impertinent, Michel. Am I
capable of inspiring friendship, even in a princess?
why disturbed? Is not friendship a good and pleas
thing?"

"Still, my child, I am, if not disturbed, at all eve
astonished at this friendship. Tell me this, which

explain it in some measure. Has our father rendered Princess Agatha some great service?"

"He has done much beautiful decorating in the palace. He has made some superb foliage in the dining-room among other things."

"I have seen all that; but he is well paid. The princess has taken a liking to him because of his zeal and disinterestedness, I suppose?"

"Yes, that must be it. Isn't it true that anybody who knows father for a little time loves him?"

"That is so. Then it is because of our excellent father that you arouse so much interest in this great lady!"

"Oh! Michel, she isn't a great lady, I tell you! she's a good woman, a kind, lovely woman."

"And what could she find to say to you, my child, for a whole day?"

"She asked me a thousand questions, about myself and father and you, about our life in Rome, your occupations, our home life and our tastes. I really believe that she made me tell our whole history day by day, ever since I was born; I talked so much that I was tired out that evening."

"It seems that this lady is terribly inquisitive; for what does it all matter to her?"

"Now you mention it, I believe that she is a little inquisitive; but it is a pleasure to answer her questions; she listens to you with so much interest, and she is so pleasant! Come, don't speak ill of her, or I shall be angry with you!"

"Very well, let us say no more about her; God forbid that I should teach you distrust and dread, my lovely angel heart! Go to bed, now; father is waiting for me. To-morrow we will talk again of your adventure, for surely this great friendship with a beautiful princess

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der. All the burning thoughts that had excited his brain an hour earlier recurred to his mind with the vividness of remorse, and it seemed to him that his lips were no longer pure enough to bless his little sister.

He was no sooner alone than he rushed through the door of the old house in which he lived, without pausing to close that of his room. To tell the truth, he paid no heed to the distance he travelled, and, still haunted by his dreams, he fancied that he stepped directly from the landing of his attic to the marble peristyle of the villa. And yet it was nearly a mile from the last houses of the suburb of Catania to the gateway of the palace.

The first face upon which his eyes fell as he was about to enter the ball-room was that of the stranger to whom his attention had been attracted as he went away. The young man was walking slowly from the room, wiping his forehead with a handkerchief trimmed with lace. Michel, puzzled by his conduct, and wondering if it were not a woman in disguise, resolutely accosted him.

"Well, my friend," he said, "did you succeed in seeing Princess Agatha?"

The stranger, who seemed absorbed by his thoughts, raised his head abruptly, and darted at Michel a glance instinct with such inexplicable distrust, and even malevolence, that the young painter felt a sort of cold shiver run down his back. It was not the glance of a woman, but of a forceful and hot-tempered man. The feeling of hostility is unfamiliar to youthful hearts, and Michel's contracted as with a sudden pang. It seemed to him that the stranger instinctively felt for a knife in his gold embroidered satin waistcoat, and he followed his movements with surprise.

"How does it happen?" said the other, in the same soft voice, in marked contrast to his angry, threatening

manner, "that you were a mechanic a short time a
and that now you are a gentleman?"

"The fact is that I am neither one nor the other,"
plied Michel, with a smile; "I am an artist employe
the palace. Do you feel more at ease? my ques
seems to have disturbed you greatly. However,
question deserves another. Did you not ask me
without knowing me?"

"Do you mean to jest, signor?" retorted the strang
who spoke in excellent Italian, without any accent to ju
tify the Greek or Egyptian antecedents suggested
Barbagallo.

"Not in the least," replied Michel, "and, as for
accosting you, pray pardon an impulsive exhibition of
riosity entirely free from malevolent intention."

"Curiosity! why curiosity?" rejoined the unknow
clenching his teeth and crowding his words together
peculiarly Sicilian fashion.

"Faith! I have no idea," replied Michel. "We ha
had enough discussion over a thoughtless word; I had
purpose of offending you. If your displeasure contin
do not look about for pretexts to begin a quarrel, for I h
no intention of avoiding it."

"Are not you the one who seeks to quarrel with me
rejoined the stranger, with a glance more threatening th
the first.

"On my word, signor, you are mad," said Michel, w
a shrug.

"You are right," retorted the unknown, "for I sta
here listening to the idle talk of a fool."

The words had no sooner passed his lips than Mich
rushed at him with a sudden determination to strike hi
But, fearing lest he might strike a woman, for the stra
ger's sex still seemed to him very doubtful, he pause

and he congratulated himself when he saw that problematical personage turn upon his heel and vanish so quickly that Michel could not determine in what direction he had gone, and concluded that he had been dreaming again.

"Surely I am beset by phantoms to-night," he said to himself. But as soon as he found himself in presence of real mortals, he recovered the notion of reality. He was asked for his card of admission. He gave his name.

"Ah! Michel," said the doorkeeper, "I did not know you. How fine you are! You look like an invited guest. Go in, my boy, and pay close attention to the lights. The pretty stuff that you have hung over our heads would take fire so quickly! It seems that you are coming in for a deal of praise. Everybody says that the figures are done by a master hand."

Michel was offended at being addressed thus familiarly by a servant, offended at being assigned to the duties of fireman, and secretly delighted nevertheless at having obtained a triumph which was already the talk of the antechamber.

He glided into the crowd, hoping to pass through unnoticed and to reach some secluded corner where he could see and hear at his ease; but there were so many people in the great ball-room that they brushed against one another and trod on one another's feet. He was carried to the other end of the vast structure before he realized the impetus that the compact mass had imparted to him; and thus he arrived at the foot of the great staircase. Not until then was he able to stop, gasping for breath, and open his eyes, nostrils, ears, and mind, to the enchanting spectacle of the fête.

Being somewhat above the flower-bedecked benches, he could see at a glance both the dances in progress about

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made up for its shortcomings in the way of perfection of feature solely by the expression of life.

"I have drawn more beautiful faces," he said to himself, "but they are not true. They do not think, they do not breathe, they do not love. It would be better that they should be less beautiful and more animate. When I roll up these canvases to-morrow, I will destroy them all, and then I will change them, and, it may be, overturn all the ideas which have guided me hitherto."

And he abandoned the quest for ideal perfection of form among the living dancers whom he was studying, to watch their movements, their grace, the attitudes of the body, the expression of the glance and smile; in a word, the secret of life.

Enchanted at first, he felt that he grew cold once more as he analyzed each being by itself. In all probability there are many ingenuous souls among women and among men; but there are very few ingenuous faces to be found at a ball in fashionable society. People there assume expressions which are almost always at variance with their characters, whether they are seeking to attract or to shun attention. Michel fancied that he could see that some were hypocritically concealing their vanity, while others arrogantly flaunted it; that this girl, who desired to seem amorous, was cold and blasé; that the gayety of that other was dismal, and the melancholy of a third a pretence. A parvenu strove to assume the air of a man of noble birth; a noble strove to adopt the bearing of a man of the people. Everybody posed more or less. The most humble tried to seem self-possessed, and even touching timidity struggled to avoid the awkwardness which triumphed over its efforts.

Michel saw several young mechanics of his acquaintance pass. They were performing the duties which

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rooms were open and lighted, when, happening to turn his head, he saw close at hand a detail of the decorations of which he had forgotten to observe the effect.

It was a rockwork grotto, which formed a recess of considerable size under the staircase. He had himself decorated with shellwork, branches of coral and picturesque plants, that cool retreat, at the farther end of which an alabaster naiad poured water from her urn into a huge shell, always brimming full of clear running water.

The taste Michel had displayed in all the details entrusted to him had induced the majordomo to allow him to arrange many things as he chose; and as this naiad had impressed him as a charming creation, he had taken pleasure in placing in her grotto the prettiest vases, the daintiest garlands and the finest rugs. He had spent a full hour surrounding the mother-of-pearl shell with a border of moss, as fine and soft as velvet, in selecting and arranging in graceful and charming disorder bunches of iris and water-lilies, and those long ribbon-like leaves which harmonize so perfectly with the undulating movement of running water.

Now the grotto was lighted by a pale light concealed behind the foliage; and as everybody was intent upon watching the dance, the entrance was unobstructed. Michel entered stealthily; but he had not taken three steps when he saw a person seated, or rather reclining, in the half-light, at the naiad's feet. He hastily concealed himself behind a jutting rock, and was about to retire; but an irresistible fascination detained him.

THE

Princess Agat
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succeed. She seemed to be floating in a magic fluid which protected her from being studied like other women. From time to time, thinking that he understood her, he closed his eyes and tried to sketch her portrait in his memory, to draw her in imagination, in strokes of flame, on the black veil which he spread before his own eyes by lowering his lids. But he saw naught but confused lines, and could not conjure up any distinct face. He was compelled to reopen his eyes in haste and gaze at her with anxiety, with intense delight, and above all, with surprise.

For there was a something indescribable about her. She was perfectly natural; of all the women Michel had seen, she alone seemed to have no thought of herself; she had assumed no studied air or manner; she did not know, or did not choose to know, what people thought of her, what they felt as they looked at her; she had the tranquillity of a mind disassociated from all human things, and the entire freedom from constraint that she might have had in absolute solitude.

And yet she was arrayed like a genuine princess; she was giving a ball, she displayed her magnificence, she played her rôle of a great lady and of a woman of the world, like any other, to all appearance. Why then that madonna-like air, that inward meditation, or that rapt contemplation of a soul above human vanities?

She was a living enigma to the young artist's restless imagination. Something still more strange perplexed him beyond measure; and that was that it seemed to him that he had not seen her that day for the first time.

Where could he have seen her before? In vain did he rack his memory. When he arrived at Catania her very name was strange to him. A person of such exalted rank, and so remarkable by reason of her wealth, her beauty, and her reputation for virtue, could not have come to

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Michel thought of all this too late to avert the consequences of his imprudence. It was too late for him to go out naturally, as he had entered. Moreover he was nailed to his place by the most intense curiosity and anxiety. Doubtless that man was the princess's lover.

He was a man of about thirty-five years, tall, and with a grave, sweet face, wonderfully handsome and regular. In his manner, as he sat facing Agatha at a distance, which indicated something betwixt respect and intimacy, there was nothing to criticise; but when Michel had recovered his presence of mind sufficiently to listen to the words that fell upon his ears, he fancied that he could detect an indication of mutual affection in this observation of the princess:

"Thank heaven it has not yet occurred to anyone to raise the curtain and discover this delightful retreat; although I might naturally take some pride in bringing my guests here,—for it is beautifully decorated to-night, —I would like to pass the night here all alone, or with you, marquis, while the fête and the dancing and the tumult run their course behind the curtain."

The marquis replied, in a tone which did not indicate a presumptuous man:

"You should have had the grotto closed altogether by a door to which you alone had a key, and have transformed it into a private salon, whither you could come from time to time to obtain some repose from the heat, the glare and the compliments. You are not accustomed to society now, and you were over-confident of your strength. You will be terribly tired to-morrow."

"I am already; but it was not the crowd and the noise that broke me down so in an instant."

"I understand that, my dear friend," said the marquis, pressing Agatha's hand fraternally in his. "Try

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"And trite rema
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"Very well! People say that you are still lovelier than all those women who take pains to appear lovely; that you outshine the most brilliant and most admired women by a certain charm peculiar to yourself, and by an air of noble simplicity which wins all hearts. They are beginning anew to be surprised that you live in solitude, and—must I tell everything?"

"Yes, absolutely everything."

"They say—I heard it with my own ears as I brushed against people who had no idea that I was so near: 'What strange whim prevents her marrying the Marquis della Serra?'"

"Go on, go on, marquis; say on; have no fear. They say, doubtless, that I am the more ill-advised in that you are my lover?"

"No, signora, they do not say that," replied the marquis, in a chivalrous tone; "and they will not say it, so long as I have a tongue to deny it, and an arm to avenge your honor."

"Dear and generous friend!" exclaimed the princess, offering him her hand; "you take that too seriously. I will wager that everybody believes and says that we love each other."

"They may believe and say that I love you, for that is the truth; and the truth always comes out sooner or later. That is why people know also that you do not love me."

"Noble heart! But, now less than ever—— Tomorrow I will talk to you more freely on this subject than I have ever done. I will tell you everything. This is neither a fitting time nor place. I must return to the ball, where it is probable that my long absence causes surprise."

"Are you sufficiently rested and calm?"

"Yes; now I car
"Ah! it costs yo
cried the marquis,
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Those words might have been an enigma to an absolutely humble and innocent young man: "*No, it was not Pier-Angelo; it was he!*" What a mysterious reply, or what extraordinary abstraction! But to Michel it was not abstraction: that *he* did not relate to Pier-Angelo, but to himself. To the princess, therefore, he was a person whom it was not necessary to call by name, and she spoke of him in that concise and emphatic way to a man who was in love with her.

That inexplicable sentence, and the reticence which had preceded it, her refusal to admit that she loved the marquis, that *solemn moment of her life* to which she had referred, that terrible shock which she said that she had had during the evening, that important confidential communication which she was to make the next day—did all of these relate to Michel?

When he remembered the inexplicable glance she had bestowed upon him when she saw him for the first time before the opening of the ball, he was tempted to give way to the most insane presumptions. It is true that, while she was talking with the marquis, there had been a moment when her dreamy eyes had shone with no less extraordinary brilliancy; but it seemed to Michel that their expression was not the same as when they had looked into his. Glance for glance, he preferred the one that had fallen to him.

Who could describe the marvellous and gorgeous romances which that rash youth's brain developed during the next quarter of an hour? They were all built upon the same foundation, the unheard-of genius of a young artist who was ignorant of his own powers, and who had suddenly revealed them in a brilliant and extensive piece of decorative work. The lovely princess for whom that masterly work was undertaken had come often, by

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which, despite the elementary simplicity of the process, are worthy to be compared with the Etruscan vases in purity of outline and delightful artlessness of subjects. I shall be happy to show you those that I own. It is a small pleasure which I should be glad to afford you, but which would by no means pay my debt to you, for I have taken very great pleasure in looking at your paintings."

The marquis's tone was so sincere, and his face wore such an unmistakable expression of kindliness, that Michel, attacked on his weak side, could not refrain from saying ingenuously what he felt.

"I fear," he said, "that your lordship desires to encourage me by more indulgence than I deserve; for I cannot suppose that you would stoop to make sport of a young artist at the outset of his career."

"God forbid, my young friend!" replied the marquis, holding out his hand with an irresistibly cordial air. "I know your father too well and esteem him too highly not to be predisposed in your favor; that much I must admit; but I can say to you in all sincerity that your paintings disclose genius and give promise of talent. You see, I do not flatter you; there are still great faults in your work, due to inexperience or to overheated imagination: but there is a stamp of grandeur and originality of conception which can neither be acquired nor lost. Work, work, my young Michelangelo, and you will deserve the noble name you bear."

"Are others of your opinion, signor marquis?" queried Michel, strongly tempted to introduce the princess's name in the conversation.

"I think that everybody shares my opinion. Your defects are criticised indulgently, your good qualities warmly praised; people are not surprised at your bril-

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XII

MAGNANI

Nothing is so mortifying as to have believed, though it were only for a single hour, in the reality of a romantic, intoxicating adventure, and to discover that you have simply been dreaming an absurd dream. Each new reflection in which our young artist indulged cooled his brain and led him back to the dismal field of probabilities. Upon what foundation had he built so many castles in Spain? Upon a glance which he had doubtless misinterpreted, and upon a remark which he must have misunderstood. All the convincing arguments which offered a flat contradiction to his extravagant conceit stood like a mountain in his path, and he felt that he was falling back from heaven to earth.

"I am very foolish," he said to himself, "to give all my thoughts to a problematical pair of eyes and to unintelligible words from a woman whom I do not know, and whom consequently I do not love, when I have far more important matters on hand. I must go and see if this marquis did not deceive me, and if everybody really considers that my paintings show genius in default of science. And yet," he continued, as he left the grotto, "there is something that savors of mystery at the bottom of all this, none the less. How does this marquis know me, when I never saw him? How does it happen that he accosted me without hesitation, with such familiarity, and called me by my Christian name, as if we were old friends?

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"They are all right," he said. "It promises, but pays nothing in advance. I have already made up my mind to destroy these canvases when I store them in the storerooms of the palace, and I will do better hereafter. I have made an experiment upon myself, which I do not regret, although I am not very well satisfied with it; but I shall know how to profit by it, and whether this undertaking is favorable to my fortunes or not, it shall be to my talent."

Having recovered all his lucidity of thought, and reflecting that he was not one of those patrons who assisted the poor by purchasing a card of admission, Michel determined to abstain from watching the fête and to walk about alone in some quiet corner of the palace until he felt absolutely calm and disposed to go home and to bed. His reason had returned, but the fatigue of the preceding days had left a touch of feverish excitement in his blood and in his nerves. He bent his steps toward the Casino, whence he could go out upon the natural terraces of the mountain.

The whole of that magnificent abode was illuminated and adorned with flowers; the public were allowed free access to every part; but, after once making the tour of the upper floors, the crowd ceased to go thither. The bulk of the spectacle, the dancing, music, bustle, youth and love, were below, in the great temporary ball-room. No one remained in the upper galleries, on the graceful staircases, or in the vast apartments, save an occasional majestic or mysterious group of solemn personages discussing affairs of state, or great coquettes collecting and detaining by their refined conversation certain chosen men around their chairs.

Toward midnight all those who had not a direct interest in the affair, or were not enjoying themselves, took their

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strive to succeed, to possess something, to reach a point where I shall not always have to obey, in a word, to be free! But whatever happiness I may attain, it seems to me that I ought not to forget the point from which I started. Unjust chance compels many men to remain in poverty who deserve as well as I, perhaps much better, to escape from it. That is why I shall never despise those whom I leave behind me, and shall not cease to love them with all my heart and aid them with all my power.

"I know that you shun your brothers in rank without despising them, without hating them; you do not enjoy yourself with them, and yet you would do them a favor on occasion; but beware! there is a touch of ill-advised pride in this sort of patronizing affection, and, although the day may come when it will be all right, remember that at the present time it may well seem misplaced. You have more intelligence and more knowledge of life than most of us, I agree; but is that a very real superiority? Will not any poor devil who happens to have more wisdom, virtue, or courage than you be entitled to consider himself your equal at least, even if his speech is abrupt and his language vulgar?

"It will happen more than once in your career as an artist that you will have to endure patiently the impertinence of the rich; indeed, if I am not mistaken, an artist's life is likely to be a constant struggle to shelter his individual merit from the contempt of the imaginary merit attached to birth, power, and wealth. However, you are aiming for that social level, without fear or shame; you accept the challenge in advance, you propose to measure strength with the bitter vanity of the great; how does it happen, pray, that that seems less offensive and less unpleasant than the harmless familiarity of the

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alone own, purchase, and order pictures, statues, urns, carvings, and engravings. To be employed by them, one must needs live with them and as they live; otherwise oblivion, obscurity and poverty are the lot of genius. Our ancestors, the noble artists of the Renaissance and the Middle Ages, were artists and artisans at once. Their position was well-defined, and was more or less brilliant according to their talent. To-day all is changed. Artists are more numerous and the rich are less powerful and magnificent. Taste has become corrupted, the Mæcenases are no longer connoisseurs. Fewer palaces are built; for one great collection that is formed, thirty are sold piecemeal to pay debts, or because the heirs of the great families prefer cash to monuments of genius. It is no longer enough, therefore, to be a man of superior talent in order to find employment and honor in one's profession. Chance, and, even more frequently, intrigue, cause some to float, while others, who it may be are of far greater worth, are submerged.

"However, I do not trust to chance, and my pride refuses to stoop to intrigue. What shall I do, then? Shall I wait until some collector's eye is attracted by a decorative figure, broadly conceived, on sized canvas, and he is so impressed by it that he comes next day to the wine-shop to hunt me up and order a picture? Such good fortune may occur once in a hundred times; but even then, on the day when it occurs to me, I shall owe my bread to the patronage of the rich man, who is beginning to be interested in me. Sooner or later I must bow before him and beg him to recommend me to others. Would it not be better for me, at the earliest possible moment, as soon as I am sure of myself, to quit the ladder and the apron, to assume the external aspect of a man who does not beg, and to present myself, with my

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but when my task is done, I must return thither, and from there travel the world over, in the disguise, perhaps premature, of a free man. If I do not do it, farewell to my whole future; I may as well renounce it to-day."

"Yes! yes! I understand," said Magnani; "you must set yourself free at any price. The journeyman's work is slavery; the work of an artist is the title of manhood. You are right, Michel; it is your right, consequently your duty and your destiny. But how dismal and cruel the destiny of an intelligent man is! One must cast off his family, leave his native land, act a sort of comedy to induce strangers to accept him as one of themselves, assume a mask in order to receive the laurel wreath, take up arms against the poor who condemn him and the rich who are loath to receive him! Why, it is horrible! It is enough to disgust one with glory! In God's name, what is glory that one should purchase it at that price?"

"Glory, as it is commonly understood, is nothing at all, I agree," replied Michel, warmly, "if it is nothing more than the trifling noise a man may make in the world. Shame to him who denies his blood and sacrifices his affections to gratify his vanity! But glory, according to my conception, is not that! It is the manifestation and development of the genius one bears within oneself. In default of enlightened judges, warm admirers, stern critics, and even jealous detractors—in default of opportunity to enjoy all the advantages, to receive all the counsels, to undergo all the persecution which follow in the wake of renown—genius withers and dies in discouragement, apathy, doubt or ignorance of itself. Thanks to all the triumphs, all the struggles, all the wounds which await us in a lofty career, we acquire the power to make the most glorious use of our capa-

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of ambition; and hitherto I have fought such tendencies vigorously in others and in myself. My parents, who are proud and obstinate like the prudent, hard-working old people that they are, taught me, as a religious precept, to remain true to family traditions—to the customs of my rank; and my heart approved of that strict and simple code of morals. That is why I have resolved not to seek success outside of my trade, though I sometimes have to crush my own impulses. That is why I have always roughly trampled upon the self-love of my young comrades as soon as I saw it sprouting; that is why my first words of sympathy and regard for you were warnings and reproaches. It seems to me now that, until I had you to deal with, I was in the right, because the others were really vain, and their vanity tended to make them selfish and ungrateful. So that I felt fully justified in rebuking them, laughing at them and preaching to them by turns. But with you I feel that I am weak, because you are stronger than I in theory. You depict art in such grand and beautiful colors, you feel so strongly the noble character of your mission, that I dare not oppose you any longer. It seems to me that you have a right to break down every obstacle in order to succeed, even your heart, as I broke mine in order to remain obscure. And yet my conscience is not satisfied with this solution. It does not seem to me to be a solution. Come, Michel, you are more learned than I; tell me which of us is wrong before God!"

"My friend, I believe that we are both right," replied Michel. "I believe that at this moment we represent between us what is taking place, contradictorily but simultaneously, in the minds of the common people in all civilized nations. You plead for sentiment. Your paternal feeling is holy and sacred. It is opposed to my

idea; but my idea is grand and true; it is as sacred l
passion for combat, as your sentiment in its theory o
nunciation and silence. You are following your du
am enforcing my right. Bear with me, Magnani,
respect you, and each of our ideals is incomplete un
is completed by the other."

"Yes, you speak of abstract ideas," rejoined Mag
thoughtfully, "and I think that I understand you; b
the concrete the question is not solved. The socie
the present day is struggling between two reefs, res
tion and resistance. Through love for my class I c
to suffer and protest with it. From the same motive
haps, you choose to fight and triumph in its name.
two methods of action seem to exclude and condemn
other. Before the divine tribunal which will prevail
timent or idea? You say, both. But on earth,
men are not governed by divine laws, how can w
sibly make those two extremes harmonize? I se
vain a means."

"But why seek it?" said Michel; "it does no
on earth at this moment. The people may free
selves and make themselves famous as a whole by
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destiny of the man who feels that he was born to
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him who feels that his calling is to enlighten men's
to seek light, though it be in solitude, though it be
the enemies of his race. The great masters
worked, from a material standpoint, for wealth, bu
a moral standpoint, for all mankind; for the poores
poor can obtain from their works a revelation and
ciation of the beautiful. Let every man follow hi
ration therefore, and bow to the mysterious de

Providence with respect to him! My father loves to sing rollicking ballads in taverns; he electrifies his companions with them; the stories that he tells sitting on a bench at a street corner, his cheery humor, and his ardor in singing or in the common toil inspire all those who see and hear him. Heaven has endowed him with the power of acting directly, by the simplest means, on the vital fibres of his brethren, zeal in labor, expansiveness in the hours of rest. For my part, I have a liking for solitary temples, sumptuous, dark old palaces, venerable masterpieces, studious reverie, the refined enjoyments of art. The society of patricians has no terrors for me. I consider them too degenerate to be feared; their names have for me a poesy which makes of them mere figures, ghosts, if you choose, and I love to walk smiling among those ghosts who do not frighten me. I love the dead; I live with the past; and from the past I acquire my idea of the future; but I confess that I have but little notion of the present, that the precise moment of my existence has no existence for me, because I am always delving in the past, and pushing all realities forward. In that way I transform them and idealize them. You see that I should not reach the same ends as my father and you, even if I used the same means. It is not in me to do it."

"Michel," said Magnani, striking his forehead, "you have won! I must absolve you and spare you my remonstrances henceforth! But I am suffering, I am suffering terribly! Your words cause me very great pain!"

"How so, my dear Magnani?"

"That is my secret, and yet I tell it to you without betraying its sanctity. Can you possibly suppose that I have not some legitimate ambition, some secret, deep-rooted desire to set myself free from the servitude in which I live? Don't you know that all men have at

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have for priding myself upon the possibility of pleasing her, the less do I fear that she will insult me by her pity. All this would change if I were a painter or a poet, if I could present her with her portrait done by my trembling hand, or with a sonnet indited by me in her honor; she would smile differently, she would speak differently. There would be reserve, mockery, or compassion in her kindness, according as I should have succeeded or failed in my artistic efforts. Oh! how far that would remove me from her, how much lower it would leave me than I now am! I prefer to be the mechanic who renders her a service by selling her the use of his arms, rather than the beginner in art to be patronized as a weakling or pitied as a madman!"

"I approve what you have done," said Michel, who had become pensive in his turn. "I like your pride, and I think that it would be a good example to follow even in my position and with the projects which I entertain, if I were tempted to seek love beyond certain obstacles, which, though absurd, are enormous!"

"Oh! it is very different with you, Michel. The obstacles which would exist between you and a great lady to-day will quickly be surmounted, and, as you yourself have said, the day will come when those women will make advances to you. Those words, which escaped from your heart, seemed to me presumptuous and absurd at first. Now that I understand you they seem perfectly natural and legitimate to me. Yes, you will win the favor of women of the most exalted rank, because you are in the bloom of youth, because your beauty is of a refined and somewhat effeminate type, which gives you a resemblance to the men who are born to a life of idleness; because you are accustomed to fashionable society, because you have the instinct of good manners and seem

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lapsed; poesy is dead within me; I have nothing left except the reasoning power, loyalty, resolution, and self-sacrifice—that is to say, suffering! Ah! Michel, spread your wings and leave this land of sorrows! fly, like a bird, to the domes of palaces and temples, and from that height look down upon this wretched people, grovelling and groaning at your feet. Pity me at least, love me if you can, and never do anything which can lower you in your own eyes."

Magnani was deeply moved; but suddenly his emotion changed its nature; he started, hastily turned his head and put his hand on the branches of a dense clump of rose myrtle, which masked a dark recess in the wall behind him. That curtain of verdure, which he put aside with a convulsive movement, concealed the entrance to a secret passage, which, as it presumably led only to the servants' quarters, was not open to the princess's guests. Michel, surprised at Magnani's movement, glanced into the passage, which was dimly lighted by a dying lamp, the farther end being in total darkness. It seemed to him that he saw a white figure gliding through the shadows, but it was so vague that it was hardly perceptible, and it might have been an illusion caused by the sudden introduction of a brighter light when the bushes were put aside. He was about to enter; but Magnani detained him, saying:

"We have no right to watch what takes place in the reserved portions of this sanctuary. My first curious movement was made without reflection; I thought that I heard a light step close beside me, and—I was dreaming, doubtless!—I fancied that I saw this bush move. But it was an illusion due to the fear that seized upon me at the thought that I was on the point of letting my secret pass my lips. I must leave you, Michel; these outpourings

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Doubtless it was for form's sake, to satisfy the proprieties, or from good nature, for she simply walked, and did not seem to take the slightest pleasure in it. But she walked better than the others danced, and, without a thought of striving to be graceful, she displayed every variety of grace. That woman really possessed an extraordinary charm which penetrated like a subtle perfume, and finally dominated or effaced everything about her. One would have said that she was a queen in the midst of her court, in some kingdom where moral and physical perfection reigned.

It was the chastity of the celestial virgins with their omnipotent serenity—a pallor in nowise extreme or sickly—which denoted the absence of intense emotions. People said that the secret of that mysterious life was either systematic abstinence from excitement or extraordinary indifference. And yet her appearance was not that of a lifeless statue. Kindness of heart lent animation to her somewhat absent-minded glance and gave an indescribable sweetness to her faint smile.

In the glare of those countless lights she appeared to Michel an entirely different woman from her he had seen in the grotto an hour earlier, when the peculiar light or his own imagination had made her appear a little terrifying to him. Now her indifference was calm rather than depressed, habitual rather than forced. She had recovered just enough animation to vanquish the heart and leave the passions undisturbed.

XIV

BARBAGALLO

If Michel could have removed his eyes from of his contemplation, he would have seen playing a flageolet in the orchestra a few s Pier-Angelo had a passion for art in any for he could assimilate it. He loved and underst and played several instruments by instinct perfect tone and time. Having attended to tails of the fête which had been placed unde vision, and having nothing more to do, he ha able to resist the desire to mingle with the who knew him well, and who took pleasure ety, his attractive, kindly face, and the enthu which he produced from time to time a shrill his instrument. When the minstrel whose pl taken returned from the buffet, Pier-Angelo s the vacant cymbals, and, toward the end o rille, was sawing with great delight the heav the bass-viol.

He was enchanted above all things to pl princess, who, having espied his bald head o form among the orchestra, bestowed upon h distance a smile and an imperceptible friendly the old man stored away in his heart. Mi would have considered perhaps that his fathe time too lavishly to the service of his dear and did not maintain strictly enough his dig

artisan. But at that moment Michel, who believed that he had forgotten or been cured of the effect of Princess Agatha's glance, had fallen so completely under its influence that he cared for nothing but to encounter it again.

His only fine clothes, which a lingering remnant of ineradicable aristocratic feeling had led him to bring through the gorges of Ætna in a travelling-bag slung over his shoulder, were of fashionable cut and in good taste. His face, too, was so handsome and so noble that there certainly was nothing to which exception could be taken in his person or in his dress. And yet his presence in the circle immediately surrounding the princess had, for some moments past, offended the eyes of Master Barbagallo, the majordomo of the palace.

That individual, ordinarily the mildest and most humane of men, had nevertheless his antipathies and his spasms of comical indignation. He had recognized Michel's talent; but the young man's impatient air when he ventured to address some trivial remark to him, and the small respect he had seemed to entertain for his authority, had caused the majordomo to look upon the painter with distrust and something like aversion. According to his ideas—and he had made a special study of titles and heraldry—nobody was noble but the *nobles*, and he looked upon all other classes of society with silent but unconquerable disdain. He was shocked and offended, therefore, to see the haughty palace of his masters thrown open to what he called a mob—tradesmen, lawyers, Jewesses, suspicious travellers, students, petty officers; in a word, to anyone who chose to pay a gold-piece for the privilege of dancing in the princess's quadrille. This subscription fête was a new invention, imported from abroad, and it overturned all his notions of decorum.

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utterly unconscious. Thereupon the majordomo, seeing that the contra-dance was nearly at an end, and that the princess could not fail to see young Lavoratori, who had planted himself so audaciously in her path, determined to accomplish his purpose by a coup d'état. He glided among the spectators like a hunting-dog in a field of grain, and, gently passing his arm through the young man's, he tried to lead him aside without any noise or disturbance.

At that moment Michel had met the glance from the princess which he had been seeking and awaiting so long.

That glance had thrilled him like an electric shock, veiled though it was by instinctive prudence; and when he felt some one grasp his arm, without deigning to turn his head to ascertain with whom he had to do, he repelled with an energetic dig of the elbow the indiscreet hand that had touched him.

"What are you doing here, Master Michel?" said the indignant majordomo in his ear.

"What business is it of yours?" he replied, turning his back and shrugging his shoulders.

"You ought not to be here," replied Barbagallo, on the point of losing patience, but restraining himself sufficiently to speak in a low tone.

"It is all right for you to be here, I suppose!" replied Michel, glaring at him with eyes inflamed with wrath, hoping to get rid of him by intimidation.

But Barbagallo had a certain courage of his own; he would have submitted to be spat upon rather than fail in the smallest degree in what he conceived to be his duty.

"I am doing my duty," he said; "go and do yours. I am sorry to disturb you; but everyone must keep in his place. Oh! don't be insolent! Where is your card of admission? You haven't one, I know. If you are allowed to see the fête, it is only on condition that you

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ing an instinctive impulse of confidence and hope, which he could not explain to himself, he turned in the direction of that friendly voice and darted forward at random, as if to seek refuge on the breast from which it issued. Suddenly he found himself close beside the princess, with his hand in hers, which pressed it tremblingly but warmly. That movement and that expression of their mutual emotion were as rapid as the lightning flash. The amazed spectators opened a passage for the princess, who walked across the hall, leaning upon Michel, leaving her partner in the middle of his final bow, the majordomo in utter dismay, wishing that he could sink through the floor, and the spectators laughing at the good man's discomfiture, and concluding that Michel was some young foreigner of distinction recently arrived at Catania, to whom the princess made haste to atone, with graceful tact and without useless words, for her majordomo's blunder.

When Signora Agatha reached the foot of the great staircase, where there were few people, she had recovered her tranquillity; but Michel was trembling more than ever.

"Doubtless she is going to show me the door herself," he thought, "without allowing anyone to divine her purpose. She is too great and too kind not to rescue me from the insults of her servants and the contempt of her guests; but the advice she is going to give me will be none the less deadly. This probably means the ruin of all my future prospects, and the wreck of the life I have dreamed of will lie here on the threshold of her palace."

"Michelangelo Lavoratori," said the princess, putting her bouquet to her face to deaden the sound of her voice, which might have reached some ear on the alert with curiosity, "I have discovered to-day that you are a genuine artist, and that a noble career lies open before you.

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in any event, many years still separate me from glory and wealth. Meanwhile, I will sup with my father in the buttery of your palace, to prove to you that I am not proud and that I accept your invitation."

"Your reply gratifies me," said the princess; "continue to be a man of spirit, Michel, and destiny will smile upon you; remember that I predict it!"

As she spoke, she looked him in the face, for she had dropped his arm and was about to leave him. Michel was dazzled by the flames that gushed from her eyes, usually so soft and dreamy, but animated for him alone —that was certain now—with an irresistible affection. And yet he was not disturbed by it as before. Either it was a different expression, or he had misunderstood it at first. What he had taken for passion was affection, rather, and the desire which had swept over him like a flood changed to a sort of enthusiastic adoration, as chaste as she who inspired it.

"But listen," added the princess, motioning to the Marquis della Serra, who passed at that moment, to give her his arm, and thus admitting him to a share in the conversation: "although there is nothing humiliating to a sagacious mind in eating in the buttery, and although there is nothing intensely exhilarating in supping in the salon, I desire that you should do neither. I have reasons for that which are entirely personal to you, and which your father must have explained to you. You have already attracted attention to-day by your work. Avoid showing yourself freely for a few days more, but without concealing yourself with an affectation of mystery, which course would have its dangers. I could have wished that you had not come to this fête. You should have understood why I did not order a card of admission to be given to you; and your father tried to remove any

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ments are enough
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your father's sh
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Michel having

his confusion and surprise beneath an affected ease of manner, the marquis added:

"Now allow me to tell you that we shall dine together on the sly: your father was accused of conspiracy long ago; I am an object of suspicion to the government; we still have enemies who may accuse us again of conspiring."

"Well, good-night, Michelangelo, we shall meet again soon," said the princess, observing Michel's bewilderment; "be charitable enough to believe that we know how to appreciate real merit, and that we did not wait for yours to be revealed before discovering your father's. Your father has been our friend for many years, and if he does not eat at my table every day, it is because I fear to expose him to persecution by his enemies by making him conspicuous."

Michel was perturbed and out of countenance, although he would not for anything in the world have given the impression that he was dazzled by the sudden favors of fortune; but at heart he felt humiliated rather than overjoyed by the affectionate lesson he had received. "For it was a lesson," he said to himself, when the princess and the marquis, being accosted by other guests, had walked away, after bidding him good-night with a friendly nod; "these wise and philosophical grandees gave me to understand clearly enough that their affability is a mark of homage bestowed upon my father rather than myself. I am invited on his account, not he on mine; so that it is not my merit which procures me these marks of distinction, but my father's virtuous qualities. O God! forgive me for the proud thoughts that led me to desire to enter upon my career apart from him! I was mad, I was wicked; I have received a most useful lesson from these great nobles, upon whom I sought to impose respect for

my origin, and who have, or pretend to h
heartfelt respect for it than I have myself."

But the young artist's wounded pride so
from this blow. "I have it!" he cried, af
few moments. "These people are deep in p
are still conspiring. Probably they did not e
trouble to look at my paintings, or else they
ing about art. They pet and flatter my fa
one of their tools, and they are trying to gai
of me, too. Ah well! if they wish to are
patriotism in my bosom, let them go about i
ent way and not attempt to exploit my yo
advantage to my reputation! I see their
they shall learn to know me. I am willin
victim of a noble cause, but not the dupe o
ple's ambition."

XV

ROMANTIC LOVE

"But," said Michel to himself, "are the p
alike in this island? Does the age of gold
in Catania, and do the servants alone retain
prejudice?"

The majordomo had just passed and salute
a depressed and crestfallen air. Doubtless h
reprimanded, or expected to be.

Michel was passing through the dressing-roo
to go home, when he saw Pier-Angelo holdin

ded great-coat of an old noble in a light wig, who was feeling about for the arm-holes, shaking as with palsy. Michel blushed at that sight, and quickened his pace. In his opinion, his father was much too good-natured, and the man who allowed himself to be waited upon thus gave an explicit contradiction to the conjectures in which he had just been indulging concerning the noble-hearted generosity of the great.

But he did not escape the humiliation he shunned. "Ah!" cried Pier-Angelo, "there he is, monsignor! Look, you were asking me if he was a handsome boy; look at him!"

"Ah! upon my word, the rascal is well turned, and no mistake!" said the old noble, standing in front of Michel, and eying him from head to foot, as he wrapped his coat about him. "I am much pleased with your decorative work, my boy; I noticed it particularly. I was just telling your father, whom I have known a long while, that you will deserve to succeed him some day in his trade; and if you don't go about town too much, you'll never land in the gutter. At all events, if you ever do get there, it will be your own fault. Call my carriage for me. Be quick; there is quite a cool wind to-night, and it's a bad thing when one has just been in such a suffocating crowd."

"A thousand pardons, your excellency," rejoined Michel, frantic with rage. "I am afraid of the wind myself."

"What does he say?" the old man asked Pier-Angelo.

"He says that your excellency's carriage is at the door," replied Pier, struggling hard to keep from roaring with laughter.

"Very good; I will hire him by the day, with you, when I have work for you."

"Oh! father!" cried Michel, as soon as
bleman had gone, "how can you laugh?
nent man treats you like a footman, and you
treatment with a smile!"

"It makes you angry," said Pier, "but
laughing at your anger and not at the goodm
ceremony. Didn't I promise to help the p
house in every way? I happen to be here;
for his great-coat; he is old, infirm, foolish—th
why I should take pity on him. And why s
pise him, pray?"

"Because he despises you!"

"According to your ideas, but not according
ception of the things of this world. He is an o
formerly a great rake. In the old days he s
daughters of the common people; to-day h
alms on the poor mothers. God will forgive
early sins, beyond any doubt. Why should
straitlaced than the good Lord! I tell yo
differences which social customs create amon
neither so important nor so real as you think,
They are all disappearing little by little, an
who are inordinately sensitive would be a littl
all those barriers would soon be nothing b
words. For my part I laugh at those wh
themselves so much better than I am, and I
my temper. It is not in any man's power to
me, so long as I am at peace with my conscien

"Do you know, father, that you are invited to
the Marquis della Serra on the day after to-mor

"Yes, that is understood," replied Pier-Ange
"I accepted this invitation because he is not
like most of the great nobles. Ah! what a pric
them would have to pay me to induce me t

couple of hours with them! But the marquis is a man of intellect. Do you mean to go there with me? Don't accept unless you choose, Michel; do you understand? You must not stand on ceremony with any one if you wish to retain your openness of heart."

There was evidently a wide difference between Pier-Angelo's idea of the honor conferred upon him by such an invitation and the idea that Michel had conjured up of his triumphal entrance into society. Intoxicated at first by what had seemed to him to be love on the part of the princess; then bewildered by the amiability of the marquis, which tended to diminish the force of the portent, but did not explain it; and, lastly, irritated by the insolence of the man in the great-coat, he did not know which way to turn. His theories concerning the victories of talent fell to the ground before the heedless simplicity of his father, who accepted everything—homage and disdain—with placid gratitude or satirical amusement.

At the doors of the palace Michel met Magnani, who was also going away. But, after walking a few steps, the two young men, revived by the morning air, determined, instead of going to bed, to skirt the hill and watch the rising of the sun, which was just beginning to whiten the sides of Ætna. They paused on a small hill, about the half height of Ætna itself, and seated themselves on a picturesque spot, having at their right the Villa Palmarosa, still gleaming with light and echoing with the strains of the orchestra; on their left the towering cone of the volcano, with the vast slopes forming an amphitheatre of verdure, rocks and snow to the summit. It was a strange and superb spectacle. Everything was ill-defined in that boundless expanse, and the *piedimonta* could hardly be distinguished from the upper belt, called *nemorosa* or *silvosa*. But while the dawn, reflected in

the sea, suffused the lower portion of the pic
pale, vague light, the bold, jagged edges and
snow of the peak were sharply outlined agains
parent atmosphere of the night, which was
blue and studded with stars about the giant's

The sublime tranquillity, the imposing sere
towering peaks, presented a marked contrast
motion all about the palace. The music, th
the servants, the rumbling of the carriages,
the presence of placid, silent Ætna, a satirical
human life as compared with the mysterious
eternity. As the light grew stronger the pea
less distinct, and the gorgeous streamer of red
that had cut the deep blue sky became blue
wound upward like an azure serpent again
background.

Then the picture changed, and the contra
versed. The commotion and noise rapidly
about the palace, and the horrors of the volca
visible; the formidable inequalities of its s
yawning chasms, and all the marks of desolat
left upon the soil from its crater to its base, ev
the point from which Michel and Magnani were
it, even to the very seashore, where Catania
prisoned by countless blocks of lava as black
That awe-inspiring marvel of nature seemed to
and insulted by the joyous airs which the orch
playing, softly now, and by the fast-dying illu
which crowned the main façade of the palace.
again the music and the candles seemed to ma
fort to revive. Evidently some indefatigabl
compelled the musicians to shake off their tor
haps the burnt-out candles set fire to their colla
paper. One would have said, watching tha

and echoing structure, that the heedless gayety of youth was struggling against the prostration of sleep or the languor of sensual desire, while the undying scourge of that sublime country sent its blazing smoke into the air, a menace of destruction which could not always be defied with impunity.

Michelangelo Lavoratori was absorbed by the spectacle of the volcano, Magnani's eyes were fixed more frequently on the villa. Suddenly he uttered an exclamation, and his young friend, following the direction of his glance, saw a white figure which seemed to be floating in space. It was a woman walking slowly on the high terrace of the palace.

"She, too," cried Magnani, involuntarily, "is watching the sun rise over the mountain. She, too, is musing, and, it may be, sighing!"

"Who?" queried Michel, whose mind had hardened itself somewhat to eject its own chimera. "Are your eyes sharp enough to see from here whether it is Princess Agatha or her maid who is taking the air on the terrace?"

Magnani hid his face in his hands and made no answer.

"Come, my friend," said Michel, obeying a sudden inspiration, "be frank with me. The great lady with whom you are in love is the Princess Agatha?"

"Well, why should I not admit it?" rejoined the young mechanic, in a profoundly sorrowful tone; "it may be that I shall soon repent of having confided to a child whom I hardly know a secret which I have never allowed those who should be my best friends to suspect. There must be some fateful reason for this longing to unbosom myself which has suddenly drawn me toward you. Perhaps it is the late hour, the fatigue, the ex-

citement caused by the music and lights and perfu
I do not know. Perhaps, rather, it is because I feel
you are the only person here who is capable of un
standing me, and that you are mad enough yourself
to be too severe upon my madness. Well, yes, I
her! I fear her, I hate her, and I adore her all at onc
that woman who is unlike all other women, whom no
knows, and whom I do not know myself."

"I certainly shall not laugh at you, Magnani; I
you, I understand you and I love you, because I th
that I can detect a certain similarity between you a
me. I, too, am excited by the perfumes, the inter
brilliancy of that ball, and the noisy dance-music,
which my imagination detects such an undertone of glo
and melancholy through its false liveliness. I, too, f
over-excited and a little mad at this moment. I fan
that there is some deep mystery in our sympathetic fe
ing for each other."

"Because we both love her!" cried Magnani, besid
himself. "Why, Michel, I guessed it from the fir
glance you bestowed upon her; you, too, love her! B
you are loved by her, or will be, and she will never lov
me!"

"Loved, I shall be loved, or am already! What a
you saying, Magnani? you are raving!"

"Listen to me; I must tell you how this disease too
possession of me, and perhaps you will understand wha
is taking place in yourself. Five years ago my mothe
was ill. The doctor who attended her, for charity
sake, had almost given her up; her case seemed hop
less. I was sitting with my face in my hands, weepin
bitterly, at the gate of our little garden, which opens o
a street which is almost always deserted, and which end
in the fields on the outskirts of the town. A woma

wrapped in a cloak passed the gate and stopped: 'Young man,' she said, 'why do you grieve so? what can I do to lighten your sorrow?'—It was almost dark and her face was hidden; I could not see her features, and her voice, which was extremely sweet, was unfamiliar to me. But her pronunciation and her manner convinced me that she did not belong to our class.

"'Signora,' I replied, rising, 'my poor mother is dying. I ought to be with her, but, as she is fully conscious and I have reached the end of my courage, I came outside to weep, so that she should not hear me. I am going back to her, for it is cowardly to weep like this.'

"'Yes,' she said, 'we must have enough courage to lend some to those who are struggling in the death agony. Go back to your mother; but tell me first if all hope is lost? has she no doctor?'

"'The doctor has not been to-day, and I understand that he can do nothing more.'

"She asked me the doctor's name and my mother's, and when I answered, she said: 'What! has she grown so much worse during the night? he told me last evening that he still hoped to save her.'

"These words, which she involuntarily let fall did not lead me to think that it was the Princess of Palmarosa who was speaking to me. I did not then know what many people do not know to-day, that that charitable woman paid several doctors to attend the poor of the city, the suburbs, and the country; that, without ever appearing in person, unwilling to receive the reward of her good works in the esteem and gratitude of others, she gave the most assiduous and careful attention to all the details of our hardships and our necessities.

"I was too much engrossed by my grief to pay the same attention to her words that I afterwards paid to

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"They say that the princess requires absolute secrecy from all those whom she employs in her good works, and indeed they go so far as to say that her modesty in that respect amounts to a mania. Her secret was kept for many years; but the truth always comes out at last, and now many know that she is the hidden providence of the unfortunate. But see the injustice and absurdity of human judgments! Some of our people declare that she once committed a crime, and made a vow to atone for it; that her noble and saintly life is a self-imposed, terrible penance; that in her heart she hates all mankind so bitterly that she will never exchange a sympathetic word with those whom she assists; but that the fear of everlasting punishment impels her to devote her life to works of charity. Isn't it horrible to form such judgments? And yet that is what I have heard said, in a very low tone, it is true, by old women who have called to see my mother in the evening, and it is sometimes repeated by younger people, who are impressed by these extraordinary conjectures. For my own part, I was fully convinced that I had not seen a phantom, and although my father, fearing lest he might lose the princess's good-will if he betrayed her *incognito*, dared not repeat that it was she who had appeared to us, he said it at first so naturally and so confidently that I could not doubt it.

"As soon as my mother was convalescent, I went and offered to pay the doctor for his services; but he refused my money, as did the druggist. They replied to my questions according to the lesson that had been taught them, that a secret association of wealthy and devout people paid them for their trouble and outlay."

XVI

CONCLUSION OF MAGNANI'S STORY

"My brain began to work," said Magnani, continu his narrative. "As the grief that had overwhelmed gave place to joy, the romantic portion of my advent recurred to my memory. The slightest details stood distinctly and assumed an intoxicating charm. T woman's soft voice, her graceful figure, her noble c riage, her white hand, were constantly in my mind. ring which she wore, of a curious shape, had attracted attention when she felt my poor mother's pulse.

"I had never entered the Palmarosa palace. It is n open to strangers or to inquisitive natives, like most of t ancient abodes of our patricians. The princess has liv in retirement there, hidden from the world, so to spea ever since her father's death, receiving very few visitor going out only at night, and that very rarely. I had watch for an opportunity to see her near at hand, for was determined to see her with the eyes which I had f her alone thenceforth. I had never desired before th time to see her features, and she had shown them seldom in ten years that the people of the suburb ha forgotten them. When she rode out the shades we lowered, and when she went to church her head w completely enveloped in her black mantilla. Indeed, was commonly said among us that she had once bee very beautiful, but that she had had a scrofulous erupti

on her face which made her so frightful that she preferred not to show herself.

"All this was simply vague rumor, for my father and other mechanics whom she employed laughed at these stories, and declared that she was the same as always. But my youthful brain was affected, none the less, by these contradictory reports, and my desire to see that woman was blended with an indefinable dread which prepared me by slow degrees for the madness of falling in love with her.

"One fact in particular added to my ardent longing. My father, who went often to the palace, as a simple journeyman, to assist the master upholsterer to hang and drape curtains and the like, refused to take me there with him, although I was accustomed to go everywhere else with him. He had often put me off with excuses which I accepted without examining them; but when my longing to find my way into that sanctuary became overpowering, he was compelled to admit that the princess did not like to see young people in her house, and that the master upholsterer carefully excluded them when he went there with his workmen. This extraordinary restriction served only to inflame my desire. One morning I resolutely took my hammer and my apron and entered the Palmarosa palace, carrying a prie-Dieu covered with velvet, which my father had just finished in his employer's workshop. I knew that it was made for Signora Agatha; I consulted nobody, but took possession of it and started.

"That was five years ago, Michel! The palace which you see at this moment, so resplendent, with its doors wide open, and filled with people, was just the same a month ago as it was at the time of which I am telling you, just the same as it had then been during the five years

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common subject of anecdote and gossip among our people than the peculiarities of the princess. It was the portrait of Dionigi Palmarosa, Princess Agatha's father, and I must tell you something of that terrible man, Michel; for it may be that you have not as yet heard his name in this country, where nobody mentions it except in fear and trembling. Indeed, I see that I should have mentioned him to you before, for the hatred and terror which his memory inspires would have explained to you in some measure the distrust, and even malevolence with which his daughter, despite all her virtues, is regarded by some persons of our station in life.

"Prince Dionigi was a fierce, despotic, cruel and overbearing man. The pride of birth made him almost insane, and every indication of spirit or of resistance on the part of his inferiors was punished with incredible arrogance and severity. Vindictive to excess, he had, it was said, killed his wife's lover with his own hand, and worried her to death, poor creature, in a sort of captivity. He was bitterly detested by his equals, and still more bitterly by the poor, whom he assisted, however, on occasion, with lordly liberality, but in such a humiliating way that one felt degraded by his benefactions.

"Now you will understand better the small degree of sympathy which his daughter has acquired. It seems to me that the constraint in which she passed her early youth, under the iron rule of such a detestable father, may well explain her reserved disposition, and what I may call the premature withering or repression of her heart. Doubtless she is afraid of reawakening antipathies connected with the name she bears, by entering into relations with other people; and if she avoids intercourse with her fellow men, it is for reasons which should

arouse the compassion and deep interest of fair-minded persons.

"A single other fact will serve to exhibit Prince Dionigi's disposition. About fifteen or sixteen years ago, I think—it is all very vague in my boyish memories,—a young mountaineer in his service, being maddened beyond endurance by the harshness of his language, ventured, they say, to shrug his shoulders as he held the stirrup for the prince to dismount from his horse. He was a worthy, honest fellow, but proud and of violent temper. The prince struck him a vicious blow. Thereafter they hated each other intensely, and the groom—his name was Ercolano—left the Palmarosa palace, saying that he knew the great secret of the family and that he would soon have his revenge. What was that secret? He had no time to reveal it, and no one ever knew what he had to reveal; for they found Ercolano the next morning on the seashore, murdered, with a dagger bearing the Palmarosa arms in his breast. His relations dared not demand justice, they were poor!"

Magnani had reached this point when the white figure they had seen wandering about the terrace crossed the flower-garden once more and went inside. Michel shuddered from head to foot.

"I don't know why your story has such an effect upon me," he said. "I seem to feel the cold blade of that dagger in my breast. That woman terrifies me. A strange superstition is creeping into my mind. A person cannot have a murderer's blood in her veins without having either a wicked heart or an unhinged mind. Give me a chance to breathe, Magnani, before you finish your story."

"The painful emotion that you feel, the dark thoughts that come to your mind," rejoined Magnani, "all fell to

my lot at sight of Dionigi's portrait; but I passed on and through another door; the staircase leading to the casino was before me, and I found myself in the princess's oratory, where I set down the prie-Dieu and looked about me. No one there! I had no excuse for going farther; the mistress of that depressing mansion had evidently gone out. So I must needs retire without seeing her, lose the benefit of my audacity, and perhaps never again have the courage or the opportunity.

"It occurred to me to make a noise to attract her attention, in case she were in the adjoining room; for I was certainly in her apartments, I could not doubt it. I took my hammer and struck the gilt nails of the prie-Dieu, as if I were putting the finishing touch to it.

"My stratagem succeeded.—'Who is there? who is making such a noise?' said a faint voice, with a pure and distinct enunciation which left no doubt in my mind of the identity of that voice with that of the mysterious visitor whose accents had not ceased to echo in my heart like an ineffably sweet melody.

"I walked toward a velvet portière and raised it with the determination born of a last hope. I saw a woman reclining on a couch, in a bedroom sumptuously furnished in antique style: it was the princess; I had roused her from her siesta.

"My appearance terrified her beyond words; she leaped into the middle of the room as if she would fly. Her lovely face, whose gentle and somewhat languid serenity I had been able to contemplate with admiration for a second, was distorted by childish, incredible terror.

"I hastened to retrace the steps I had taken.—'I beg your excellency not to be frightened,' I said: 'I am only a poor upholsterer's apprentice, an awkward lout,

ashamed of my mistake. I thought that your highness was out, and I was working here——'

"'Go away!' she exclaimed, 'go away!'

"And with a gesture in which there was more bewilderment and dismay than sternness and anger, she pointed to the door.

"I attempted to go, but I seemed to be rooted to the floor as in a dream. Suddenly I saw the princess, who had risen with extraordinary vehemence, turn as pale as a lovely lily; her breathing ceased; her head fell back; her arms dropped at her sides. She would have fallen to the floor had I not rushed to her and caught her in my arms.

"She had lost consciousness. I placed her on her couch. I was so bewildered that it did not occur to me to call for help. Indeed what would have been the use of ringing? Everybody was asleep or attending to his special duty in that house, where silence and solitude alone seemed to be absolute masters. May God forgive me! Twenty times since then I have been tempted to enter her service as a footman!

"Oh! Michel, it would be impossible for me to tell you to-day what took place within me during the two or three minutes that that woman lay stretched out like a dead woman before my eyes, with her lips as white and dry as pure wax, her eyes half-open, but strange and expressionless, her dark hair falling over her brow on which the cold perspiration stood in beads, and all that exquisite, refined beauty, above all comparison in my thought. It was not the intoxicating flame of a gross animal passion that was kindled in my plebeian blood. It was adoration, as pure and timid and refined and mysterious as the being who inspired it. I felt an irresistible longing to prostrate myself at the feet of a dead and gone

martyr, for I thought that she was dead, and it seemed as if my soul were ready to leave the earth with hers.

"I dared not touch her; I did not know what to do to restore her. I had no voice with which to call for help. I was motionless in my perplexity, as one is when struggling violently in a horrible dream. At last a phial fell under my hand, I know not how. She recovered consciousness little by little, looked at me without seeing me, not understanding or seeking to understand who I could be. At last she raised herself on her elbow and seemed to be collecting her thoughts.

"'Who are you, my friend?' she said, seeing me on my knees by her side, 'and what do you want? You seem to feel very sorrowful.'

"'Ah! yes, your highness, God is my witness that I am very unhappy to have frightened you so.'

"'You did not frighten me,' she said, with an evident embarrassment which astonished me. 'Did I cry out? —Ah! yes,' she continued, with a shudder, yielding once more to an impulse of distrust or alarm.—'I was asleep; you came in; you frightened me. I do not like to be surprised in that way. But did I say anything unkind to you, that you weep?'

"'No, your highness,' I replied; 'you fainted, and I would rather have died than have caused you this discomfort.'

"'Am I alone here, pray?' she cried in a tone of distress that tore my heart. 'Can anybody who pleases enter my apartments and insult me?'—She rose and ran to her bell-rope. She seemed desperate—beside herself. Her words and her excitement had affected me so painfully that it did not occur to me to fly. And yet, if she had rung—if anyone had come—I should have been treated like a criminal. But she stopped, and the ex-

pression of her face told me the truth at once concerning her disposition.

"It was a blending of unhealthy suspicion and sympathetic kindliness. She had been so wretchedly unhappy in her early youth—so everyone said! At all events, she could not have been ignorant of her father's execrable character. She may have witnessed some murder in her childhood. Who knows what scenes of violence and terror have been enacted behind the thick walls of that dumb mansion? It was by no means impossible that she might have acquired therefrom some mental malady of which I had just witnessed an outbreak; and yet what angelic sweetness her glance expressed when she dropped the bell-cord, apparently overcome by my humble attitude and the grief by which I was overwhelmed!

"'You came in here by chance, did you not?' she said. 'You did not know that it is a whim of mine not to like new faces; or, if you did know it, you had the courage to disregard my orders, because you have had some misfortune which I can lighten? I have seen you somewhere; I have a vague remembrance of your features. Your name is——?'

"'Antonio Magnani, your highness. My father works here sometimes.'

"'I know him; he has some little means. Is he sick? Has he run in debt?'

"'No, signora,' I replied, 'I do not ask alms, although you are the only person on earth from whom I could accept alms without blushing. I have long wished to see you; not to beg from you, but to bless you. You saved my mother; you encouraged me. You leaned over her pillow; you restored my hope and her life. That is certain; of course you do not remember it, but I shall never

forget it. May God reward you for what you did for us! That is all I wanted to say to your highness; and now I will go away, begging you not to blame anyone, for the fault is entirely mine.'

"'I will not tell anyone that you came into my house in spite of my orders,' she said. 'Your employer and your father would reprove you for it. Nor do you say that you saw me in such a fright. People would say that I am mad, as they say now, I believe, and I do not much like to have people talk about me. As for your thanks, I do not deserve them. You are mistaken; I never did anything for you, my child.'

"'Oh! I am not mistaken, your highness; I should have known you among a thousand. The heart has instincts deeper and truer than the senses. You do not wish your benefactions to be discovered, so I do not speak of them. I do not intend to thank you for paying the doctor; no, you are rich, and it is easy for you to give. But you are not obliged to love and pity those whom you help. And yet you pitied me when you saw me weeping at the door of the house where my mother lay dying, and you loved my mother when you leaned over her bed of pain.'

"'But I tell you again, my child, that I do not know your mother.'

"'That is possible; but you knew that she was sick. You wished to see her, and charity was in your very glance—how ardent at that moment!—since your glance, your voice, your touch, your breath, cured her as by a miracle. My mother was conscious of it; she remembers it; she thinks that it was an angel who appeared to her; she addresses her prayers to you because she thinks that you are in Heaven. But I was sure that I should find you on earth, and should have an opportunity to thank you.'

"Princess Agatha's cold and impassive face relaxed as if involuntarily. It lighted up for an instant with a warm glow of sympathy, and I saw that treasures of kindliness were contending in that suffering heart against a painful misanthropical propensity.—'Well,' she said, with a divine smile, 'I see, at all events, that you are a good son and adore your mother. God grant that I may in truth have brought her good fortune! but I believe that God alone deserves thanks. Thank Him and worship Him, my child; He alone understands and can relieve certain sorrows, for men cannot do much for one another. How old are you?'

"I was twenty at that time. She listened to my reply, and said, looking at me as if she had not yet noticed my features: 'True, you are older than I thought. You can come and work here when you choose. I am accustomed to your face now, and it will not startle me again; but another time do not wake me suddenly by hammering in my ears in that way, for I am always depressed and nervous when I wake. That is my disease!'

"While she was speaking, and while she looked after me as I walked toward the door, her eyes expressed this thought: 'I do not offer you my assistance in life, but I will keep my eye on you, as I do on so many others, and I will find ways to serve you without your knowledge; and I will take measures to avoid having to listen to your thanks again.'

"Yes, Michel, that is what was said by that face, at once angelic and cold, maternal and unfeeling; a terrible enigma, which I have never been able to solve, and which I am less able to solve to-day than ever."

XVII

THE CYCLAMEN

Magnani ceased to speak, and it did not occur to Michel to question him. But at last the young painter, coming to himself, asked his friend for the rest of his story.

"My story is at an end," replied Magnani. "Ever since that day I have been admitted to the palace as a workman. I have often seen the princess, but I have never spoken to her."

"How does it happen, then, that you love her? for you do not know her? you do not know her real opinions?"

"I thought that I had guessed them. But, during this last week, when she has seemed inclined to emerge suddenly from her tomb, throw open her house, and take part in social life; especially to-day, when she has been going about and conversing familiarly with people of our station, with kindly words and cordial invitations—for I overheard the conversation that you had with her and the Marquis della Serra on the main staircase; I was close at hand,—I no longer know what to think of her. Yes, even recently I thought that I had fathomed her character. Twice a year, in spring and autumn, I have come here with other workmen, I have seen her pass from time to time, walking slowly, with an absent-minded, melancholy, yet perfectly tranquil air. If she sometimes seemed downcast and distressed, the serenity of her glance was not disturbed. She always bowed to us col-

lectively with greater courtesy than persons of her rank ordinarily show to us. Sometimes she would exchange with the master upholsterer or my father a few pleasant words, equally free from pride and from warmth. She seemed to feel an instinctive respect for their years. I was the only young workman admitted to her house, but she never seemed to pay the slightest attention to me. She did not avoid my glances, but met them without seeing them.

"At certain times, however, I noticed that she saw many more things than she seemed to see; and that people who complained, even when she did not seem to hear them, obtained justice or help at once, without knowing whose was the mysterious hand put forth over them. You see, she conceals her boundless charity as other people conceal their shameful selfishness. And you ask me how it happens that I love her! Her virtue arouses my admiration, and the dumb despair which seems to be crushing her inspires in my heart profound and affectionate compassion. To admire and to pity—is not that to adore? The pagans, who have left so many magnificent ruins on our soil, sacrificed to their gods, all radiant with strength and glory and beauty; but they did not love them; and we Christians have felt the light of faith pass from our minds into our hearts, because God was shown to us in the guise of a bleeding, tear-bedewed Christ. Ah! yes, I do love that woman, who has paled, like a flower of the woods, beneath the terrible shadow of paternal tyranny. I do not know the story of her infancy, but I divine the misery of her girlhood. They say that, when she was fourteen, her father, being unable to force her to marry in accordance with the views dictated by his pride and ambition, to which he proposed to sacrifice her, confined her for a long time in a secluded room of

yonder palace, and that she suffered there from hunger, thirst, heat, neglect, and despair. Nothing definite has ever been known about it. Another version of the story also gained currency; it was said that she was in a convent; but the terror-stricken air of her servants said plainly enough that her disappearance was a part of some unjust and unnatural punishment.

"When Dionigi died, his heiress reappeared in the palace, with an old aunt who was little better than he, but who allowed her to breathe a little more freely. They say that at that time again she had several brilliant offers of marriage, but that she obstinately refused, thereby much angering the princess, her aunt. Her death put an end at last to her niece's persecutions, and at the age of twenty she found herself alone and free in the house of her fathers. But it was evidently too late for her to rouse from the state of prostration to which so much sorrow had brought her. She had lost the strength and the desire to be happy. She was torpid, a little inclined to be morose, and seemingly incapable of inviting the affection of others. She gained the affection, however, of some persons of her own rank, and it is certain that the Marquis della Serra, whom she refused to marry when he entered the lists several years ago, has never ceased to love her ardently. Everybody says so, and I know it; I will tell you how.

"Although I pride myself, without undue boasting, on being a good workman, I confess that when I am in the palace, I am, in spite of myself, the slowest of the slow. I am excited and perturbed. The ring of the hammers irritates my nerves, as if I were a silly girl; I am overcome by the heat at the slightest exertion with my arms. Every moment of the time I either have a feeling that I am going to faint, or am tempted to creep into dark cor-

ners, crouch there out of sight, and allow myself to be left behind. I surprise myself listening, prowling, spying. I no longer dare to go into the princess's oratory or her bedroom alone. Oh! no; although I know the road perfectly well. My respect is stronger now than my insane and restless passion! But if I can breathe the perfume that escapes through the chinks of the door of her boudoir; if I can hear, even at a distance, the sound of her light footsteps, which I know so well—then I am content, I am drunk with joy.

"Thus I have heard, I dare not say involuntarily—for if chance placed me within earshot, my will was not strong enough to prevent me from listening,—more than one interview between the princess and the marquis. How often have I been consumed by frantic jealousy? but I have acquired certain knowledge that he is only her friend, a loyal, respectful, submissive friend.

"One day, among others, they had a conversation, every word of which, I believe, is engraved with fatal distinctness on my memory.

"The princess was saying when I entered the adjoining room:

"'Oh! why question me so persistently? You know, my friend, that I am absurdly impressionable; that the thought of the past freezes my blood, and that, if I could make up my mind to speak of it—I believe, yes, I believe that I should go mad!'

"'Very well, very well,' he cried, 'let us not speak of it, let us be content with our tranquil friendship. Look at that lovely sky and those sweet cyclamens, which seem to smile in your hands.'

"'These flowers do not smile,' she replied, 'you do not understand their language, and I can tell you why I love them. It is because they are in my eyes the emblem of

my life and the image of my heart. See how curiously limp they are; they are pure and fresh and fragrant; but is there not something unhealthy and decrepit in the inversion and unnatural upturning of their petals?'

"'It is true,' said the marquis, 'they have a sort of dishevelled look; they grow as a general rule on windswept peaks. One would say that they were trying to fly away from their stalks as if there were nothing to hold them, and that nature had provided them with wings like butterflies.'

"'And yet they do not fly away,' continued the princess; 'they are firmly attached to their stalks. Although apparently fragile, there are no hardier plants, and the most violent winds never strip them of their petals. While the rose succumbs to a hot day, and strews the burning earth with its leaves, the cyclamen is obstinate, and lives many days and nights in retirement, and, as it were, shrunken into itself: it is a flower that has no youth. You probably have never seen it just as it is opening. I have patiently watched that mysterious process; when the bud opens, the petals are rolled tightly together and separate with an effort. The first one that frees itself stretches out like a bird's wing, then throws itself backward and resumes its twisted position. Another follows, and the flower, almost before it is open, is already tremulous and wrinkled, as if it were about to die of old age. That is its way of living, and it lives a long while so. Ah! it is a melancholy flower, and that is why I carry it everywhere.'

"'No, no, it does not resemble you,' said the marquis, 'for its uncovered breast exhales its fragrance freely to all the winds of heaven, whereas your heart is mysteriously closed, even to the most discreet and least exacting affection!'

"They were interrupted; but I knew enough. Ever since that day, I too have loved the cyclamen, and I always cultivate it in my little garden; but I dare not pluck the flowers and smell them. Their odor makes me ill and drives me mad!"

"It is the same with me," said Michel. "Yes, it is a dangerous odor! But I no longer hear the carriages, Magnani. Doubtless the palace will soon be closed. I must go and join my father, for he must be tired out, whatever he may say, and he may need my help."

They walked in the direction of the ball-room. It was deserted; Visconti and his fellow-servants were extinguishing the candles which were still carrying on the struggle against the daylight.

"Why this fête after all?" said Magnani, as he glanced about that immense hall, whose height seemed to be doubled by the darkness overhead, while the bluish rays of dawn crept sadly into the lower portions through the open doors. "The princess might have helped the poor in other ways, and I cannot yet understand why she submitted to make this public demonstration of charity when she had always done good so mysteriously hitherto. What miraculous change has taken place in our reserved benefactress's existence? Instead of rejoicing at it, I, although I would give my life for her, am hurt by it, and cannot think of it without bitterness. I loved her as she was; I cannot understand her when she is cured, consoled, and effusive. Is everybody to know her and to love her now? People will no longer say that she is mad, that she once committed a crime, that she is concealing a horrible secret, that she is ransoming her soul by pious works, although she detests mankind! Madman that I am! I am afraid of being cured myself, and I am jealous of the happiness that she may have recovered! Tell me, Michel,

do you suppose that she has made up her mind to love the Marquis della Serra, and that she will invite the court, the city, and the country, to celebrate her betrothal magnificently under her own roof? She gave a royal fête to-day; perhaps she will give a popular fête to-morrow. She is making her peace with everybody; great and small will make merry at her wedding! Ah! there will be dancing there! what fun for us, eh? and how kind the princess is!"

Michel remarked his companion's bitterness and irony; but although he was conscious of a thrill of strange emotion at the idea of Agatha's marriage to the marquis, he put all the more restraint upon himself. He, too, had been struck to the heart, but the shock was too recent for him to dare, or to deign, to give the name of love to his feeling. Magnani's madness served as a warning to him. He pitied him, but there seemed to him to be in that young man's abnormal position something humiliating to which he did not choose to subject himself.

"Come to your senses, my friend," he said. "Such a beautiful fête, at night, has a tendency to excite one, especially when one is only a spectator. But here comes the sun above the horizon, and it should dispel all phantoms and all visions. I feel as if I had just waked from a fantastic dream. Listen! The birds are singing outside; there is nothing here but dust and smoke. I am very sure that your madness is not so absorbing every hour of your life as you fancy at this moment of excitement and unreserve. I will wager that when you have slept two hours you will return to your work feeling like a different man. For my part, I already feel the salutary effect of real life, and I promise you that the next time we see the spectre pass close to us, I will not try to dispute her glance with you."

"Her glance!" cried Magnani, bitterly, "her glance! Ah! you remind me of the glance she bestowed upon you, before the ball opened, the first time she saw your face. My God! what an expression! If it had fallen upon me, just once in my life, I would have killed myself instantly, in order not to live any more upon certainty and cold reason, after such an illusion, such delirious joy. And you, Michel, felt the consuming fire that she communicated to you. You were scorched by it for an instant, and, but for my mockery, you would still gloat over it with rapture. But what does it matter to me now? I see clearly that she has lost her mind; that she has deprived her solitary sorrow of its sanctity; that she loves someone, you or the marquis—what matter which? Why this special display of friendship for your father, whom she hardly knew a year ago? My father has worked for her ever since she was born, and she barely knows his name. Does she propose to cap the climax of her eccentric life by an act of downright insanity? Does she propose to atone for her father's tyranny and unpopularity by marrying a child of the people—a mere boy?"

"You are the one who is mad," said Michel, disturbed and almost angry. "Go and get a breath of fresh air, Magnani, and don't involve me in the vagaries that your excitement suggests to you. Signora Agatha is sleeping peacefully at this moment, remembering neither your name nor mine. If she honored me with a kindly glance, it was because she loves painting and is pleased with my work.—Look, my friend," added the young artist, pointing to the figures of his fresco, upon which a rosy beam of the morning sun shone through the open windows. "There are the only intoxicating realities of my life. Let the lovely princess marry the Marquis

della Serra. I shall be very glad; he is a courteous gentleman, and I like his face. I, when I choose, will paint a more perfect and less problematical divinity than the pale-cheeked Agatha."

"You, wretched boy? Never!" exclaimed Magnani, indignantly.

"I agree that she is beautiful," rejoined Michel, with a smile. "I have scrutinized her, and I have profited by that scrutiny. I have obtained from her all that I should never ask her for, the spectacle of her grace and her charms, to reproduce them and idealize them at my pleasure."

"I have always been told that artists had hearts of ice," said Magnani, staring at Michel in blank amazement. "You have seen the storm which drives me wild, and you remain cold—you laugh at me! Ah! I blush to think that I have betrayed my madness to you, and I am going away to hide my head!"

Magnani disappeared, frantic with excitement, and Michel was left alone in the almost deserted ball-room. Visconti was extinguishing the last candles, and Pier-Angelo, before taking his leave, was assisting to restore order temporarily in that structure which was to be entirely removed before evening.

Michel also assisted, but languidly. His own reflections having cooled his excitement, he felt utterly exhausted, mentally and physically.

Magnani's abrupt outbreak disturbed him. He reproached himself because, after undergoing in silence the rebound of the young mechanic's agitation, he had not succeeded better in sympathizing with his trouble, but had allowed him to go away uncomforted. On the other hand, he could not avoid a slight feeling of irritation. It seemed to him that Magnani had carried his

effusiveness too far in seeking to convince him that he, Michel, was the object of a sudden passion on the part of the princess. It was so absurd, so improbable, that Michel, who was more self-possessed, more of a man of the world at eighteen than Magnani could ever be, shrugged his shoulders pityingly.

And yet, self-esteem is such a persistent and impertinent adviser that Michel now and again heard a voice within him saying: "Magnani has guessed aright. Jealousy gives him a keenness of vision which you yourself have not. Agatha loves you; she took fire at first sight. And why should she not love you?"

Michel was intoxicated and abashed at once by these flushes of vanity which rose to his cheeks. He was in haste to return home and recover his tranquillity altogether with sleep. And yet he desired to wait for his father, who was still at work, zealous and indefatigable, attending to a thousand minute details, a thousand apparently unnecessary precautions.

"Patience!" said the excellent Pier-Angelo. "I shall have finished in a minute; but I want our dear princess to be able to sleep in peace, and I don't propose that anybody shall come here and make a racket before to-night. Above all things, I don't propose to leave a single candle lighted in any corner. Now is the time when there is most danger of fire! Look! that idiot of a Visconti has left the lamp in the grotto burning; I can see it from here. Go and put it out, Michel, and take care not to spill oil on the couch."

Michel went into the grotto of the naiad; but, before extinguishing the lamp, he could not resist the temptation to gaze for a moment at the beautiful statue, the lovely foliage with which he had decorated it, and the couch whereon he had seen Agatha as in a dream. "How

young she looked and how lovely she was!" he thought; "and how that man who loves her gazed at her, with an adoration which betrayed itself in spite of him, and which infected the most immaterial portion of my heart! I noticed others during the ball who stared at her with an insolence born of desire, which made my whole being quiver with indignation! All these great nobles love her, each in his own way, and she loves no one of them!"

And Agatha's glance passed through his memory like a lightning-flash, its dazzling brilliancy putting to flight all reason, all fear of ridicule, all self-distrust.

While musing thus, he had extinguished the lamp, and had sunk upon the cushions of the divan, expecting that his father would call him and that he might enjoy one last moment of comfort before leaving that fascinating grotto.

But fatigue overpowered him. He could contend no longer against the chimeras of his imagination. Half-reclining comfortably on the couch, and alone for the first time in twenty-four hours, he rapidly lost consciousness. For one moment he dreamed with his eyes open. The next moment he was sleeping soundly.

XVIII

THE MONKS

How many minutes,—or was it seconds only?—passed while Michel was overpowered by that irresistible lassitude, he had no idea. The power of the imagination, when transported into the domain of dreams, travels so

fast and surmounts so many obstacles at a single bound, that time is an inadequate measure of it, especially in the first sleep.

Michel had a strange dream. A woman softly entered the grotto, walked to where he sat, leaned over him and gazed at him for a long time; he felt her fragrant breath caress his brow, he fancied that he felt also the fire of her glance fastened passionately upon him. But he could not see her, for it was dark in the grotto, and, moreover, it was impossible for him to raise his heavy eyelids; but it was Agatha; Michel's heart, inflamed by that woman's presence, told him so plainly enough.

At last, as he tried to rouse himself in order to speak to her, she placed her cool, soft lips on his forehead and imprinted a kiss thereon, so long, but so light, that he could not summon the strength to reply to it, overcome as he was by joy, and at the same time by the fear that it was only a dream.

"But it is a dream, alas! it is nothing but a dream," he said to himself, still sleeping; and yet the fear of waking caused him to wake. So it is that, in sleep, the instinctive, frantic desire to prolong the illusion causes it to vanish more quickly.

But what a strange and persistent dream! Michel, with his eyes open, sitting half erect, supported by his trembling arm, saw and heard that woman fly. The curtain at the entrance of the grotto being lowered, he could distinguish only an indistinct figure; he felt the touch of a silk dress; the curtain opened and closed again so quickly that it seemed to him that the phantom passed through without touching it.

He started to follow her; but all his blood rushed back to his heart so violently that he could not stand erect, but was compelled to fall back on the divan, and it was

a full minute before he was able to rush to the blue velvet portière that separated him from the ball-room.

He drew it aside with a convulsive gesture and found himself face to face with his father, who said, with a jocose and placid air:

"So it seems that we have been having a nap, eh, my boy? Now, everything is in order; let us go home and see if little Mila is awake."

"Mila?" cried Michel, "is Mila here, father?"

"It may well be that she isn't far away," replied the old man. "I'll bet that she hasn't closed her eyes all night; she was so anxious to come to see the ball! But I forbade her to leave the house before daylight."

"It is daylight now," said Michel, "and Mila is probably here! Tell me, father, did some woman, my sister, perhaps, just come into the grotto?"

"Did you dream it? I saw no one. To be sure, my eyes weren't looking in that direction all the time, and I saw some striped skirts prowling about outside, which meant that some curious creatures had stolen into the garden. Can Mila have come in while my back was turned?"

"Why, this very instant, father, just as you came to the opening, someone went out, a woman; I am certain of it!"

"You are talking at random now, for I saw nothing but my shadow on the curtain. Come, you need a good nap, let us go home. They are just closing the last door. If your sister is here we shall find her."

Michel was about to follow his father; but as he was turning away he saw something glistening in the grotto and was led to cast a last glance inside. Was it a spark that had fallen on the carpet, near the couch? He stooped: it was a piece of jewelry, which he picked up

and examined by daylight. It was the gold locket, surrounded with diamonds and bearing the princess's crest, which she had given Mila. He opened it to make sure that it was the same. He recognized a lock of his own hair inside.

"I knew that Mila came into the grotto," he said to his father, as they walked toward the garden; "she gave me a kiss which woke me."

"She evidently must have gone in there," rejoined Pier-Angelo, indifferently; "but I didn't see her."

At that instant Mila emerged from a clump of magnolias, and came forward, laughing and capering, to meet her father, whom she kissed affectionately, as she did Michel.

"It is high time for you to come home and rest," she said; "I came to tell you that your breakfast is waiting. I was so impatient to see you! Are you terribly tired, father, dear?"

"Not at all," the good man replied, "I am used to these things, and a sleepless night is all pleasure when you sup till morning. Your breakfast will go begging, Mila; but your brother here is asleep on his legs. Come, children; let us be off; see, they are closing the garden gates now."

But, instead of continuing to close the gates, the servants suddenly threw them wide open again, and Michel saw a procession of monks file in, monks of divers orders, all carrying wallets and purses; they were the begging brothers of all the mendicant orders, which have numerous establishments in Catania and its neighborhood. They were making their usual round and had come to collect for their respective communities the broken meat left from the fête. Some two score of them passed slowly through the gate; most of them had asses to carry away

the avails of their quest. There was something so surprising and comical in their obsequious manner and their solemn bearing when they entered the gardens, escorted by their asses,—strange guests at a ball—that Michel, diverted from his emotion, had much ado to keep from laughing.

But no sooner were they fairly inside the gates than they broke ranks, and, shaking off their consequential, discreet manner, began to run toward the ball-room, each striving to outstrip his neighbors, beating their asses to make them move faster, hurrying, jostling, and freely exhibiting their greed and their jealousy. They overran the ball-room, almost breaking down the fragile doors, and attempted to ascend the main staircase of the peristyle, or to force their way into the kitchens. But the butler and his *officers*, being prepared for the assault, and knowing their ways, had carefully barricaded all the issues; they brought forth the fragments destined for the monks, and distributed them as impartially as possible. There were dishes of meat, remnants of pastry, pitchers of wine, and even pieces of glass and porcelain which had been broken during the fête, and which the good monks put together with great care and mended most skilfully, for the adornment of their own sideboards, or to sell to collectors. They quarrelled over the booty with little decency, reviled the servants for not giving them all that they were entitled to, for treating one better than another, for failing in respect for the patron saints of their convents. They even threatened them with the infirmities which those saints were supposed to be especially skilful in curing when the afflicted person had acquired their good-will.

"Bah! what a miserable ham you have given me!" cried one. "You are already deaf in one ear; you can

depend upon it that before long you will not be able to hear the thunder with the other."

"Here's a bottle half empty!" cried another. "No prayers will be said for you under our roof, and you'll never be cured of the stone, if you take that terrible disease."

Others plied their trade gayly, with jests that made the distributors laugh, and they showed so much wit and good-nature that the servants secretly slipped the best pieces into their wallets.

At Rome Michel had seen dandified Capuchins, redolent with perfume under their frocks, and displaying their sandals, with poetic gravity, in close proximity to the Holy Father's consecrated slipper. The poverty-stricken Sicilian monks seemed to him very indecent, very laughable, and ever so little cynical, when they swooped down upon the crumbs of that feast like a flock of greedy crows and chattering magpies. He was attracted, however, by the high-spirited and intelligent faces of some of them. It was the Sicilian common people again, in the sack-cloth of the cloister—a noble race which bends beneath the yoke but cannot be broken.

The young artist had returned to the ball-room to look on at this curious spectacle, and he watched its various incidents with the attention of a painter who turns everything to his own profit. He noticed especially one of the monks, whose hood was pulled down to the end of his beard, and who did not beg. He kept apart from the others, and walked about the room as if he were more interested in the place where the fête had been given than in the possible benefit he might derive from it. Michel tried several times to see his features, and to judge therefrom whether the intelligent mind of an artist or the regrets of a man of the world were concealed beneath

that monkish garb. He saw him stealthily put aside his hood but once, and then he was impressed by his repulsive ugliness. At the same instant the monk turned his eyes upon him with an expression of malevolent curiosity, and instantly looked away as if he feared to be surprised staring at other people.

"I have seen that ugly face somewhere," said Michel to his sister, who was standing by his side.

"Do you call that a face?" replied the girl. "I saw nothing but a goat's beard, the eyes of an owl, and a nose that looked like an old crushed fig. You won't paint his portrait, I hope?"

"You said just now, Mila, that you knew several of these monks from having seen them begging in our suburb; have you ever met that fellow?"

"I don't think so; but, if you are anxious to find out his name, it will be very easy, for here is a brother who will tell me."

And the girl ran to meet a monk who was the last to arrive, without a wallet, and without an ass, but with a little purse simply. He was a tall, handsome man, of uncertain age; his beard was still as black as ebony, although his crown of hair was beginning to turn gray. The keenness of his black eyes, the noble contour of his aquiline nose, and the smile that played about his red lips, indicated robust health, conjoined with an amiable and decided character. He had neither the unhealthy thinness nor the absurd obesity of most of his brethren. His chestnut-colored frock was neat and clean, and he wore it with a majestic air. He won Michel's confidence at the first glance; but it angered the young man to see Mila almost throw her arms about the Capuchin's neck, and take his beard in her two little hands, laughing and

pretending that she proposed to kiss him whether he would or not.

"Come, come, little one, softly, softly," said the monk, pushing her away with fatherly gentleness. "No matter if I am your uncle, a monk musn't be kissed."

Thereupon, Michel bethought him of the Capuchin Paolo-Angelo, of whom his father had so often spoken to him, and whom he had never seen. *Fra Angelo* was Pier-Angelo's brother in affection not less than by birth. He was the youngest of Michel's uncles. His intellect and the dignity of his character made him the pride of the family, and as soon as Pier-Angelo saw him, he ran to Michel to introduce him.

"Brother," said the old decorator, pressing the Capuchin's hand warmly, "give my son your blessing; I should have brought him to your convent to ask it before this if we had not been employed here a little beyond our strength."

"My child," said Fra Angelo to his nephew, "I give you the blessing of a kinsman and a friend; I am happy to see you, and your face pleases me."

"I can say the same," replied Michel, putting his hand in his uncle's.

But, to manifest his affection, the good monk, who had the muscles of an athlete, squeezed his fingers so hard that the young man thought for a moment that the bones were broken. He did not wish to let it appear that that caress was a little too rough; but the perspiration stood out on his forehead, and he said to himself with a smile, that a man of the build of his uncle, the Capuchin, was better adapted to demand alms than to beg.

But, as strength and gentleness almost always go hand in hand, Fra Angelo approached the distributor of alms with a self-restraint and reserve as marked as the eager-

ness and persistence of his fellows. He saluted him with a smile, opened his purse without deigning to put out his hand, and closed it without looking to see what had been put in it, muttering a very laconic sentence of thanks; after which he returned to his brother and nephew, refusing to burden himself with provisions of any sort.

"In that case," said a very pious footman, "you have not enough money!"

"Do you think so?" rejoined the monk. "I have no idea. However little it may be, the convent must needs be satisfied with it."

"Do you wish me to go and demand more for you, my brother? If you will promise to pray for me every day this week, I will make them give you more."

"Oh! don't take that trouble," replied the dignified Capuchin, with a smile; "I will pray for you *gratis*, and my prayers will be worth all the more. Your mistress, Princess Agatha, gives enough in charity, and I come to her house only in obedience to my orders."

"Uncle," said little Mila, in an undertone, "there is a brother of your order yonder, whose face puzzles my father and brother. They think that he looks like somebody else."

"Somebody else? Whom do you mean?"

"Look at him," said Pier-Angelo. "Michel is right, he has a bad face. You must know him. He is standing all alone, over there under the musicians' platform."

"So far as his figure and his carriage are concerned, I don't recognize him as any brother of our convent. And yet he wears the frock of a Capuchin. But why does he interest you?"

"Because it seems to us," said Pier, lowering his voice, "that he resembles Abbé Ninfo."

"In that case, off with you," said Fra Angelo, hastily.

"I will go and speak to him, and I will soon find out who he is and what he is here for."

"Yes, yes, let us go," said Pier-Angelo. "Go first, children. I will follow you."

Michel put his sister's arm through his, and they were soon on the way to Catania.

"It seems that this Abbé Ninfo wishes us ill," said Mila to her brother, "and has the power to injure us. Do you know why, Michel?"

"Not very well; but I am suspicious of a man who disguises himself, apparently for the purpose of spying. Whether we are concerned or somebody else, mystery conceals evil projects."

"Psha!" said the heedless Mila, after a moment's silence, "perhaps he is only a monk, like the rest. He stood apart and lurked in corners, as some of them often do after the crowd has passed, on days of processions or feast-days, to see if they can't find some jewel that somebody has lost. Then they pick it up without a word and carry it to their convent, to be surrendered to its owner in consideration of a round sum for one or two masses, or to be used in unearthing some love secret; for these good fathers are very inquisitive, as a general rule!"

"You don't love the monks, do you, Mila? You are only half a Sicilian?"

"That depends. I love my uncle and those who are like him."

"By the way," said Michel, reminded by the words *lost jewel* of the adventure which the Capuchins had driven from his mind; "you had been in the ball-room, hadn't you, a moment before I met you in the garden?"

"No," she replied; "if you had not taken me in with you to watch the monks beg, I never should have dreamed of going in. Why do you ask me that? I saw the ball-

room all finished before the fête. What do I care to see an empty room where no one is dancing? It was the ball, the dancing, the dresses, that I wanted to see! But you wouldn't take me even as far as the door last night!"

"Why not tell me the truth when the matter is of no importance? There is nothing out of the way, my dear little sister, in your having come to the naiad's grotto to wake me just now."

"Father says that you are asleep on your legs, Michel, and I see that he is quite right. I will take my oath that since yesterday morning, when I brought you the leaves you asked me to pick, I have not been inside the grotto."

"Ah! Mila, this is too much. You used not to tell falsehoods, and I am sorry to see that you have that wretched habit now."

"Hush, brother, you insult me," said Mila, proudly withdrawing her arm. "I have never lied, and I shall not begin to-day, just to please you."

"Little sister," rejoined Michel, walking after her and quickening his pace to keep up with her, for she was hurrying on ahead, hurt and grieved, "will you please show me the locket Princess Agatha gave you?"

"No, Master Michelangelo," retorted the girl, "you are not worthy to look at it. In the days when I cut a lock of your hair to wear upon my heart, you were not unkind as you have become since."

"If I were in your place," said Michel, ironically, "I would take the locket from my bosom and throw it in the face of the unkind brother who teases me so!"

"Here! take it!" said Mila, pulling the locket from her bosom, and handing it to Michel with an angry gesture; "you can take back your hair, I don't care for it

any longer. But return me the locket; I care for that because it was given me by somebody kinder than you."

"Two lockets just alike!" said Michel to himself, placing them side by side in his hand; "is this the sequel of my vision?"

XIX

YOUTHFUL LOVES

Michel dared not ask his sister for the explanation of such a prodigy. He ran and shut himself up in his little room, and, seating himself upon his bed, instead of going to sleep, he opened and compared those two precisely similar trinkets and their contents. They were absolutely indistinguishable, as were the two locks of hair; so that, after Michel had examined and handled them a long while, he no longer knew which belonged to his sister. Thereupon he recalled a remark of hers, which had made little impression upon him, although it had seemed somewhat strange to him for an instant. Mila declared that the lock of hair she had entrusted to the princess had diminished by one half in the jeweller's hands.

It was not possible to explain that curious fact. The princess did not know Michel, she had never seen him; he had not returned to Catania when she had taken Mila's scapulary and exchanged it for this beautiful locket. It is difficult to believe that a woman can fall in love with a man simply at sight of a lock of his hair,

Michel cudgeled his brains to no purpose. He could think of no explanation save this, which was far from satisfactory to his intense curiosity: perhaps the princess had at some time been attached to someone whose hair was of precisely the same shade and texture as Michel's. She wore it in a locket. Observing Mila's fervent adoration of that relic of her brother, she had ordered a locket just like her own, and had given it to her.

But how impossible are the probabilities of life to a mind of eighteen years! Michel thought it much more probable that he had been loved unseen; and when he was overcome by sleep, the two lockets were still in his half-open hand.

When he awoke about noon, he found only one of them; the other had probably fallen among the bedclothes. He pulled his bed to pieces and turned it upside down; passed an hour searching in all the cracks of his floor, and all the folds of his clothes, which lay on a chair by his pillow. One of the two talismans had disappeared.

"This is a trick of Signorina Mila," he thought. His door closed with a latch only, and the girl was singing over her work in the room adjoining.

"Ah! you are up at last!" she said with a pout, when he appeared in her presence. "That is very lucky! Now will you kindly return my locket?"

"I should say, my dear, that you came and took it while I was asleep."

"Why, you have it in your hand!" she cried, seizing his hand unexpectedly. "Come, open your fingers, or I will prick them with my needle."

"I will do it," he said, "but this locket isn't yours. You have already taken the one that belongs to you."

"Really!" said Mila, snatching the trinket from her

brother's hand, for he made little resistance, but watched her closely; "this is not mine? Do you think I can be mistaken?"

"In that case you have the other, Mila."

"What other? Have you one also? I don't know anything about that; but this is mine. Here is the princess's crest. It is my property; it is my souvenir. Take back your hair. If we are at odds, I am willing you should; but this locket shall never leave me again."

And she replaced it in her bosom, by no means resolved to take out the hair, for which she cared more than she chose to admit in her childish wrath.

Michel returned to his room. The other locket must be there. There was so much candor and confidence in Mila's expression and her words! But he found nothing, and so he determined to search his sister's room as soon as she had gone out. Meanwhile, he tried to make peace with her. He coaxed and cajoled her, and, vowing that all that had happened was only a jest on his part, reproached her with being proud and sensitive.

Mila consented to make peace and to kiss her brother; but she continued to be somewhat downcast, and her lovely cheeks were tinged with a less delicate flush than usual.

"You chose a bad time to tease me," she said. "There are days when one does not feel in the mood to endure raillery, and I thought that you were teasing me on purpose to make sport of my disappointment."

"Your disappointment, Mila!" cried Michel, pressing her to his heart with a smile. "Have you been disappointed? Because you didn't see the ball last night, I suppose? Oh! you are a very unfortunate little girl and no mistake!"

"In the first place, Michel, I am not a little girl.

shall soon be fifteen, and I am old enough to have disappointments. As for the ball, I cared very little about it; and now that it's over, I don't think about it at all."

"What is this great sorrow, then? Do you want a new dress?"

"No."

"Your nightingale isn't dead?"

"Don't you hear him singing?"

"Perhaps our neighbor Magnani's big tom-cat has eaten up your turtle-dove?"

"I would like to see him try it! I tell you that I don't bother my head about Signor Magnani or his cat."

The tone in which she uttered Magnani's name made Michel prick up his ears, and, upon glancing at his little sister's face, he saw that she had her eyes fixed, not upon her work—although her head was bent—but upon a wooden gallery where Magnani usually worked, opposite Mila's chamber. At that moment Magnani was walking along his gallery. He did not look at Mila's window, and Mila did not look at her work.

"Mila, my darling child," said Michel, taking both her hands and kissing them, "do you see that young man with the absent-minded air?"

"Well," Mila replied, as the blood came and went in her cheeks, "what about him?"

"I want to tell you, my child, that if your heart is ever inclined to love, you must not think of that young man."

"What nonsense!" said the girl, shaking her head and trying hard to laugh. "He is the last man of whom I should ever think, I tell you that!"

"Then you will be exceedingly wise," rejoined Michel, "for Magnani's heart is not free; he has long been in love with another woman."

"That doesn't concern me, and is of no possible interest to me," said Mila; and, bending over her work, she turned her wheel swiftly. But Michel was pained to see two great tears fall upon her skein of silk.

Michel's heart was very tender. He understood the feeling of shame by which his young sister was overwhelmed, and which added a fresh pang to those from which he himself was suffering. He saw the superhuman efforts that the poor child made to stifle her sobs and overcome her confusion. He felt that that was not the moment to humiliate her more by insisting upon an explanation.

So he pretended to see nothing; and, thinking that he would reason with her when she was more self-possessed, he left the room where she was working.

But he was so excited himself that he could not stay in his own room. He made one last, fruitless search, and, abandoning the hope of finding the vanished talisman,—hoping that it would appear when he was not thinking about it, as often happens in the case of lost articles,—he determined to go and see Magnani and make peace with him; for they had parted in anger, and Michel, unable to avoid a secret feeling of pride in the thought that the princess was madly in love with him, felt that his generous solicitude for his unfortunate rival redoubled.

He crossed the yard and entered Magnani's father's workroom on the ground floor. But he looked in vain for Antonio in his room. His old mother told him that he had gone out a moment before; but could not tell him in what direction he had gone. Michel thereupon strolled into the country, half thinking of overtaking him, half absorbed by his own musings.

Meanwhile Magnani, impelled by the same feelings of

loyalty and regard, had determined to go and see Michel. His modest dwelling had a second exit, and the one that he took led less directly, through a dark and narrow passage at the rear of the other two houses, to the poor, old-fashioned house which Pier-Angelo occupied with his children.

Thus the two young men did not meet. Magnani went upstairs and looked into a large, bare, dilapidated room, where he saw Pier-Angelo stretched out on his cot-bed, in a deep sleep which the emotions of love and youth no longer disturbed.

Thereupon Magnani climbed the staircase, or rather the ladder leading to the attics, and entered Michel's chamber, which adjoined Mila's.

Michel's door was open; Magnani went in, and, finding no one there, was about to go out again, when the cyclamen, which Michel had carefully placed in an old Venetian glass of curious workmanship, caught his eye. Unquestionably Magnani was the soul of probity, the incarnation of scrupulous honor; and yet it is not certain that, if he had dreamed that that flower had fallen from the princess's bouquet, he would not have stolen it. But it did not occur to him; he concluded simply that Michel, like himself, had a passion for the cyclamen.

Suddenly Magnani was roused from his contemplation by a sound which startled him. Somebody was weeping in the adjoining room. He heard sobs, stifled but heart-rending, behind the partition, not far from the door between the two rooms. Magnani was well aware that Mila lived on that floor. He had often nodded to her smilingly from his gallery, when he saw her, blooming with youth and beauty, at her window. But, as she had made no impression on his heart, and as he had never spoken to her except as to a child, he did not consider at

that moment the exact location of her attic, nor indeed did he think of her at all. To be sure there was nothing masculine in her manner of weeping, but in Michel's voice there were some tones so youthful and so soft that it might well be he who was mourning so. Magnani thought only of his young comrade, and, full of solicitude for him, hastily opened the door and entered Mila's room.

At sight of him the girl uttered a loud shriek and fled to the farthest corner of her room, hiding her face.

"Mila, my dear little neighbor," cried honest Magnani, standing respectfully near the door, "forgive me, do not be afraid of me; I made a mistake, I heard someone weeping as if his heart would break, and I thought it was your brother. I didn't stop to think, but rushed in here, in my anxiety—but, great heaven, my dear child, why are you weeping so?"

"I am not weeping," replied Mila, stealthily wiping her eyes, and pretending to look for something in an old chest of drawers against the wall; "you are entirely mistaken. I thank you, Signor Magnani; but leave me, you ought not to come into my room like this."

"True, true, I know it, I am going away, Mila; and yet I don't dare to leave you thus, you are too much overcome, I can see. I am afraid you are sick. Let me go and wake your father, so that he can come and comfort you."

"No, no! do not think of it! I don't want you to wake him!"

"But, my dear ——"

"No, I tell you, Magnani; you would make me much worse if you should cause my father that trouble."

"But what is the matter, Mila? Your father has not been scolding you, has he? You never deserve to be scolded! And he is so kind, so gentle, he loves you so dearly!"

"Oh! no, indeed, he never said a word to me except words of love and kindness. You see that you are dreaming, Magnani; I have no sorrow, I was not weeping."

"Why, I can see from here that your face is swollen and your eyes red, my dear girl. What heart-breaking grief can one have at your age, lovely, and beloved by all, as you are?"

"Don't laugh at me, I beg you," said Mila, proudly. But she turned pale, and trying to sit down calmly, fell sobbing upon her chair.

Magnani had so little suspicion that he could possibly be anything more than a friend in her eyes, and his feeling for her was so placid that he no longer thought of leaving her. He approached her without any other emotion than affectionate interest, sat down at her feet on a cushion of plaited straw, and, taking her hand in his, questioned her with an assumption of something like paternal authority.

Poor Mila was so perturbed that she had not the strength to repel him. It was the first time that he had ever spoken to her so near and with such evident affection. Oh! how happy she would have been but for the fatal words that Michel had said to her! But those words were still ringing in her ears, and Mila was too proud to allow her secret to be suspected. She made a mighty effort, and answered with a smile that her trouble was a matter of little importance, and was due simply to a little quarrel she had had with her brother.

"Michel quarrel with you, my poor angel?" said Magnani, watching her carefully; "is it possible? Oh! no! you are mistaken. Michel loves you more than all the world, and he is quite right. If you had quarreled, he would be here, as I am, at your feet, and much more eloquent than I to comfort you; for he is your brother, and

I am only your friend. But, however that may be, I am going to find him; I will scold him roundly, if he is in the wrong. But it will be enough for him to see you cast down and changed as you are, to make him much unhappier than you."

"Magnani," said Mila, detaining him as he rose, "I forbid you to go and find Michel. That would be giving too much importance to a piece of childish folly. Pay no more attention to it, and do not speak of it to him or to my father. I assure you that I have already forgotten it, and that my brother and I will be entirely reconciled tonight."

"If it is only a childish quarrel," said Magnani, sitting down beside her, "why, your susceptibilities are altogether too keen, my dear Mila. I have sisters too, and when I was not so sensible as I am now, when I was Michel's age, I used to tease them a little. But they didn't cry; they paid back my mischief with interest, and I always came out second best."

"That was because they had spirit, and apparently I haven't enough to defend myself," replied Mila, sadly.

"You have a great deal of spirit, Mila, I have noticed that; you are not Pier-Angelo's daughter and Michel's sister for nothing, and you have a better education than the other young women of your station. But you have more heart than spirit, since you can defend yourself only with your tears!"

Magnani's praise comforted and pained the girl at the same time. She was flattered to find that, while not seeming to pay any heed to her, he had observed her closely enough to be able to do her justice. But the tranquil kindliness of his manner told her plainly enough that Michel had not deceived her.

XX

BEL PASSO AND MAL PASSO

Suddenly Mila formed a firm resolution; for, as Magnani had truly said, she was superior to most of the young girls of her class in education, and Pier-Angelo had cultivated in her mind ideas as noble as his own. She had, in addition, a tincture of youthful enthusiasm, blended with the habit of courage and self-sacrifice, which her good taste and ingenuousness led her to conceal beneath apparent heedlessness. It is the acme of stoicism to be able to sacrifice oneself with a smile on one's face, and with no outward indication of suffering.

"My dear Magnani," she said, rising with her accustomed serenity of expression, "I thank you for your friendly interest in me; you have done me good, and I feel perfectly calm. Let me work now, for I didn't do my *day's work* in the night, as you did; I must do my stint and earn my wages. Go away, so that people may not say that I am lazy, and that I waste my time chattering with the neighbors."

"Good-bye, Mila," replied the young man. "I pray God to restore your peace of mind to-day, and to make you happy all the days of your life."

"Thanks, Magnani," said Mila, offering him her hand. "I rely upon your friendship from this day."

The air of noble resolution with which that girl, so crushed by grief a moment before, offered him her hand,

and the tone in which she pronounced the word friendship, like an heroic farewell to all her illusions, were not understood by Magnani; and yet there was in that gesture and that tone something that moved him deeply, although he could not guess the cause. Mila was transformed before him in the twinkling of an eye; she no longer seemed a charming child, she was serious and beautiful as a woman.

He took that little hand in his hard and powerful one, which did not hesitate to seal the friendly compact by a fraternal grasp, but which trembled suddenly at the touch of a hand as soft and dainty as a princess's; for Mila was very careful of her person, and knew how to be at once industrious and refined in her occupations.

Magnani fancied that he held Agatha's hand, which, by a strange caprice of fortune, he had touched once in his life. He felt a sudden wave of emotion, and drew Pier-Angelo's daughter to his heart as if to give her a brotherly kiss. He dared not do it; but she offered her forehead innocently, saying to herself that it would be the first and the last, and that she would cherish its memory as the symbol of an everlasting farewell to all her hopes.

Magnani had been living for five years under a self-imposed law of absolute chastity. It was as if he had taken an oath to imitate Agatha's exceptionally austere mode of life, and, engrossed by a fixed idea, had determined to waste away by slow degrees, knowing naught of love or marriage. He had never kissed a woman, not even his sisters, since he had carried in his heart that chimera of a hopeless passion. It may be that he had made a vow to that effect in some moment of painful agitation. But he forgot that grim vow when he felt young Mila's lovely dark head resting trustfully against

his breast. He gazed at her for an instant, and those limpid black eyes, in which there was an expression of grief and courage which he could not understand, cast him into a sort of delirium of surprise and passion. His lips did not touch Mila's brow; they turned away trembling from her bright red lips, and rested upon her soft brown neck, perhaps a second or two longer than was absolutely necessary to cement a bond of fraternity.

Mila turned pale, her eyes closed, and a sorrowful sigh escaped from her broken heart. Magnani, shocked beyond measure, placed her upon a chair and fled, overwhelmed with dismay, astonishment, and, perhaps, remorse.

Mila, being left alone, was very near fainting; she staggered to the door and bolted it; then she knelt on the floor beside her bed, hid her face in her hands, and remained there absorbed by her suffering. But she had ceased to weep, and grief gave place to an excitement instinct with strenuous and ardent aspirations. Pier-Angelo's optimism, that faith in destiny which is a sort of superstition in stout hearts, awoke within her. She rose, rearranged her hair, looked in her mirror, and said aloud, as she resumed her work:

"I don't know why, nor when, nor how, but he shall love me; I have a right to desire it, I do desire it, and God will assist me!"

When Michel returned, he found her tranquil and lovely, gazing intently at a copy of the *Virgin of the Chair*, which he had made for her with much care, and which she had hung, not in her alcove, but above her mirror. He congratulated himself that he had allowed her to give way freely to her first outburst of grief, and that she had recovered her strength of will in her solitary meditation. He almost reached her side before she heard

him; but she saw his face in the glass as he leaned over her to kiss her on the neck.

"Kiss me there," she said, offering him her cheek, "but never on my neck!"

"Why that prohibition for your brother, little madcap?"

"It is a whim of mine," she said. "You are beginning to have a beard and I don't want you to scratch my skin."

"Ah! you flatter me exceedingly," laughed Michel; "that fear does too much honor to my budding moustache! I had no idea that it could frighten anybody as yet! But do you care less for the smoothness of your cheek than of your pretty neck, little Mila? Is that because you have just been admiring this beautiful Madonna's neck?"

"Perhaps so!" she said. "It is very beautiful, really, and I would like to resemble that face in every feature."

"I should judge that you were making the attempt before your mirror. These are very profane ideas to indulge in before that holy image!"

"No, Michel," replied Mila, gravely. "There is nothing profane in my conception of her beauty. I have never understood it as I have to-day, and I fancied that no one had ever been able to create so beautiful a face as Princess Agatha's. But I see now that Raphael went farther. He gave his Madonna more strength of character, if not more tranquillity. That divine face is intensely alive; it has a great deal of will; it is sure of itself. She is the most virtuous, but, also, the most loving of women. She seems to say: 'Love me because I love you.'"

"Well, well, Mila, where did you find that?" cried

Michel, looking at his sister in surprise. "I fancied I was dreaming as I listened to you!"

The conversation of the two children was interrupted by the arrival of their father. He came to suggest to Michel that they should go and demolish the ball-room. All the workmen who had taken part in building it had agreed to meet at three o'clock in the afternoon, to rid the palace of that temporary structure.

"I know," said Pier-Angelo, "that the princess is anxious to preserve your frescoes on canvas, and I want you to help me roll them up and carry them safely to one of the galleries of the palace."

Michel followed his father, but they were no sooner outside the city than the old man stopped.

"My boy," he said, "I am going to the villa alone, for I must talk a moment with the princess about that infernal abbé, who disguises himself as a monk to spy upon something or somebody in her house. Do you walk about two miles to the northwest, following the path that begins here, and turning neither to right nor left. In an hour you will reach the Capuchin convent of Bel Passo, where your uncle Fra Angelo told me that he would wait for you till sunset. He has satisfied himself that the suspicious monk whom we pointed out to him was no other than Ninfo, and, without deigning to inform me what he supposes his designs to be, he told me that he wished to have a serious talk with you. I suspect that your uncle knows more than we do about the cardinal's condition and the abbé's plans; but he is a man of sense and foresight. He has probably made inquiries during the morning, and I shall be very glad to have his opinion."

Michel followed the path, and, after an hour's walk through the most beautiful country that the mind can conceive, he reached the gate of his uncle's convent.

This convent was situated on a hill above a small village in the cultivated district, gay with flowers and dotted with country houses, which lies at the foot of Ætna. The building was sheltered by the great trunks of venerable trees, and the garden, exposed to the African sun, commanded a magnificent view bounded by the sea.

This romantic spot, strewn with formidable masses of lava, bore two names which had been given it in turn, and which, in view of the uncertainty as to which it was more likely to retain, were bestowed upon it indifferently at the time of which we write. The location being superb, the soil fertile, and the climate mild and agreeable, it had been called on general principles *Bel Passo.* Then had come the terrible eruptions of Ætna and Monte-Rosso, which had overwhelmed and ruined it; whereupon it had been christened *Mal Passo.* Then, as time passed on, the village and convent were rebuilt, the lava broken up, cultivation resumed, and they gradually reverted to the original complimentary name. But these two contrasting designations were still confused in the memories and the customs of the people. The old men, who had seen their country in its primitive splendor, said *Bel Passo,* as did the children, who had seen it only after it had emerged from chaos, and had been restored to life, as it were. But the men who had seen the spectacle of the catastrophe and experienced its disastrous results in their early years—who had had no other cradle than toil and terror, and were just beginning to obtain some result from their labors—called it *Mal Passo* more frequently than *Bel Passo.*

For a very long time that gorge had changed its name thus, twice or thrice in a century, according to circumstances; an example of the heedless courage of the human race, which builds its nest beside the broken

branch, and continues to love and beautify and sing the praises of the domain which it has with difficulty reconquered from the tempests of yesterday.

However, this spot afforded equal justification for both of the names which disputed possession of it. It was an epitome of all the horrors and all the charms of nature. Where the river of fire had poured its destructive waves, the ridges of lava, the gray wastes of slag, the ruins of the former soil, upturned, flooded or baked, recalled the evil days, when the population was reduced to begging, and wives and mothers were in mourning; Niobe changed to stone at the sight of her murdered children. But near at hand old fig-trees, reanimated by the passage of the flame, had put forth new branches, and strewed with their succulent fruit the new grass and the worn-out soil, newly steeped in the most generous juices.

Everything that did not lie directly in the path of the molten lava—everything that was saved by an inequality of the ground—had benefited by the destruction that had passed so near. So it is with mankind, and death everywhere makes room for life. Michel noticed that, in some places, one of two twin trees had disappeared as if carried away by a cannon-ball, and displayed its charred stump beside the proud trunk which seemed to tower triumphantly over its ruins.

He found his uncle occupied in breaking away the rock to enlarge a bed planted with flourishing vegetables. The garden had been dug out of solid lava. The paths were covered with mosaics of enamelled porcelain, and the beds of vegetables and flowers, cut from the very heart of the rock, and made of earth brought from elsewhere, resembled gigantic boxes buried to the edges. To make the resemblance more striking, between the beds

and the porcelain paths they had left the black lava, as it were a border of box or thyme, and at each corner of the beds it had been fashioned into a ball, the sacramental ornament of our orange-tree boxes.

It will be seen, therefore, that nothing could be neater or more ugly, more symmetrical or more depressing, in a word, more monastical than that garden, an object of pride and affection to the good monks. But the beauty of the flowers, the splendor of the bunches of grapes which enveloped heavy pillars of lava, the soft murmur of the fountain, which sent forth a thousand silvery threads to refresh each plant in its rocky cell, and above all, the view from that terrace with its southern exposure, afforded ample compensation for the melancholy effect of such hard and patient toil.

Fra Angelo, armed with an iron sledge hammer, had removed his frock in order to be more free in his movements. Clad only in a short brown jacket, he displayed the mighty muscles of his hairy arms in the sunlight, and at every blow that he dealt the rocky mass, shivering it into fragments, he gave a sort of savage grunt. But, when he saw the young artist, he drew himself up and showed a mild and serene countenance.

"You come just in time, young man," he said. "I was thinking about you, and I have many questions to ask you."

"I thought, uncle, that you had, on the contrary, many things to tell me."

"Yes, doubtless I should have, if I knew what sort of man you are; but, except for the tie of relationship that unites us, you are a stranger to me; and, whatever your father may say, blinded perhaps by his affection, I do not know whether you are really a man. What do you think of the position in which you find yourself?"

"To avoid my having to answer your questions by asking others, you would do well, perhaps, my dear uncle, to put them clearly in the first instance. When I know what my position is, I shall be able to tell you what I think of it."

"Then you know nothing of the secrets in which you are concerned?" said the Capuchin, examining Michel with a stern and searching gaze; "you have not even a suspicion of them? You have never guessed anything? Nobody has ever told you anything?"

"I know that my father was involved in a political conspiracy long ago, about the time of my birth, I think. But at that time I was quite unable to decide whether he was in the right or in the wrong. Since then he has never explained his position to me in that respect."

"He lacks confidence in you, then, or you take little interest in his welfare?"

"I have questioned him at times; he has always answered evasively. I have never drawn therefrom, as you do, uncle, the conclusion that he distrusted me; that would have seemed impossible to me; but I have always thought that, having really had a hand in the business, he was bound by oaths, as is the case in all secret societies. So I should have thought that I failed in the respect I owe him, if I had questioned him farther."

"That is well said; but does it not conceal a profound indifference touching the affairs of your native country, and a selfish disregard of the sacred cause of its liberty?"

Michel was a little embarrassed by this question, so concisely put.

"Come," continued Fra Angelo, "answer without fear, I am only asking for the truth."

"Very well, I will answer you, uncle," said Michel, meeting the monk's cold glance, which distressed him in spite of himself, for he would have liked to have the regard of that man, whose face, voice, and bearing commanded his respect and sympathy. "I will tell you what I think, since you wish to know it, and also what I am, at the risk of losing your good-will. Convince me that the cause of liberty, so far as Italy and Sicily are concerned, is really the cause of the men who are deprived of liberty, and you will see that I will devote myself to it, I do not say with enthusiasm, but with frantic zeal. But alas! hitherto I have always seen men sacrifice themselves simply to change masters, while the noble and wealthy classes used them for their own profit, in the name of this or that idea. That is why, while I am not indifferent to the spectacle of the misery and oppression of my fellow-countrymen, I have never chosen to conspire under the auspices and for the benefit of the patricians, who are so eager in inciting us to conspire."

"O mankind! O mankind! *everyone for himself* will always be your motto!" cried the Capuchin, springing to his feet as if beside himself with indignation; then, resuming his seat with a strange and bitter laugh, he added, looking at Michel with an ironical expression: "Signor prince, *excellenza*, you are pleased to make sport of us, I judge!"

XXI

FRA ANGELO

The Capuchin's strange outbreak caused Michel the most profound embarrassment; but, being determined to maintain his independence and sincerity, he affected a tranquillity which he did not feel.

"Why do you call me *prince* and *excellenza*, my dear uncle?" he said, forcing himself to smile; "is it because I spoke like a patrician?"

"Precisely; every one for himself, I tell you!" replied Fra Angelo, resuming his melancholy gravity. "If that is the spirit of the age which you have been studying at Rome, if that is the new philosophy upon which the young men in other lands are fed, we have not seen the end of our misfortunes, and we can continue to tell our beads in silence. Alas! alas! here is a fine state of affairs! the children of our people will not stir for fear of saving their former masters with them, and the patricians will not dare to lift a finger for fear of being devoured by their former slaves! God save the mark! Meanwhile, the foreign tyranny laughs and grows fat upon our spoils; our mothers and sisters ask alms or prostitute themselves; our brothers and our friends die on dung-heaps or on the gallows! It is a noble spectacle, and I am amazed, Michelangelo, that you came from Rome, where you had before your eyes naught but the splendors of the Holy See and the masterpieces of art, to contemplate our poor Sicily, with her population of beggars, her ruined nobles,

her lazy or brutalized monks! Why did you not take a pleasure trip to Naples? you would have seen wealthier nobles there and a more opulent government, made so by the taxes which are causing us to die of starvation; a more tranquil people, who worry but little over the fate of their neighbors. 'What do we care for Sicily? it is a conquered country and its people are not our brothers.'—That is what they say at Naples. Go to Palermo, where they will tell you that Catania is not to be pitied and can save itself unassisted, with its silk worms. Go to Messina, where they will tell you that Messina is no part of Sicily, and that they have no use for its bad counsels and its evil spirit. Go to France; the newspapers there say every day that pious, cowardly peoples like us deserve their fate. Go to Ireland; they will tell you that they want no help from the heretics of France. Go everywhere, and everywhere you will find yourself well abreast of the ideas of your time; for people will say to you everywhere what you just said: 'Everyone for himself!'"

Fra Angelo's words, his tone and his countenance made a deep impression upon Michel, and he was honest enough to confess it to himself at once. The artistic chord was struck, and what would have seemed to him in any other man mere sophistry and declamation, seemed simple and mighty in the mouth of that monk.

"My father," he said with ingenuous candor, "it may be that you are right to scold me as you do. I have no idea at all; and yet I might offer, in defence of my scepticism, many arguments which come and go in my mind as I listen to you. It does not seem to me that I am as wicked and as contemptible as you think. But with you I am much more eager to improve myself than to defend myself. Please go on."

"Yes, yes, I understand," rejoined Fra Angelo, proudly. "You are a painter, and you are studying me; that is all. This language seems strange to you in the mouth of a monk, and you are thinking of nothing but the picture you will paint of St. John preaching in the wilderness!"

"Do not laugh at me, I entreat you, uncle; you do not need to do it to show me that you have more wit and learning than I. You chose to question me; I told you my thought honestly. I hate oppression, whether it appears in the shape of the past or the present. I should not like to be the mere instrument of another man's passions and to sacrifice my future as an artist to the reconstruction of the fortunes and honors of a few great families who are naturally ungrateful and instinctively despotic. I believe that a revolution in such a country as ours would have no other result. I feel that I am man enough to take a gun to defend my father's life and my sister's honor. But, when it comes to joining some mysterious society, whose members act with their eyes closed, and see neither the hand that guides them nor the goal toward which they are proceeding—unless you can prove to me forcibly and convincingly that it is my duty—I will not do it, though you were to curse me, my dear uncle, or to make sport of me, which is much worse."

"What makes you think that I want you to join anything of that sort?" said Fra Angelo, with a shrug. "I admire your distrustful nature. I like to see that your first feeling with regard to your father's brother is the fear of being tricked by him. I wanted to know you, young man, and I am very much cast down by what I know of you."

"What do you know of me, pray?" cried Michel,

testily. "Come, try me in proper form, and let me know what my crimes are."

"Your whole crime consists in not being the man you should be," replied Fra Angelo; "and that is very unfortunate for us."

"I understand no better."

"I know that you cannot understand what I am thinking at this moment! otherwise you would not have spoken so before me."

"In heaven's name, explain yourself," said Michel, unable to endure these attacks any longer. "It seems to me that we are fighting a duel in the darkness. I cannot parry your blows, and I apparently strike you when I am trying to defend myself. With what do you reproach me, or what do you ask of me? If I am a man of my time and of my class, is it my fault? I have just stepped foot for the first time on this island devoted to the worship of the past. I am not an atheist, but I am not pious. I do not believe in the superiority of certain classes, nor in the necessary inferiority of my own. I do not feel that I am the born servant of the old patricians, the old prejudices, and the old institutions of my native land. I place myself on a level with the haughtiest and most venerated heads, in order to pass judgment on them, so that I may know whether I should bend my head before true merit, or protect myself against unwarranted prestige. That is the whole of it, uncle, I give you my word. Now you know me. I admire what is noble, great and sincere before God. My heart is susceptible of affection and my mind prostrates itself before virtue. I love art, and I am ambitious of renown, I agree; but I love serious art and seek pure renown. I will not sacrifice any one of my duties to them; but I will not accept false duties, and I

will spurn false principles. Am I a miserable wretch for that? and must I, in order to have the honor of being a true Sicilian, become a monk in your convent, or a brigand on the mountain?"

Michel's spirited outburst did not displease the Capuchin. He listened to it with interest, and his face softened. But the young man's last words produced the effect of an electric shock upon him. He leaped up from his bench, and seizing Michel's arm with that herculean strength of which he had given him a specimen in the morning, exclaimed: "What is that metaphor? What are you talking about?"

But, observing Michel's air of stupefaction at this new outbreak, he began to laugh: "Well, even if you do know it—even if your father has told you—what does it matter? Other people know it, and I am none the worse off. Well, my child, you have unconsciously used a very powerful illustration; it was what one might call the marrow of the truth. All men are not made to be fed upon it; there are milder and more digestible truths which suffice for the majority. But to those who desire to be absolutely logical in their opinions and their acts, what seems to you a paradox is the merest commonplace. You look at me in amazement? I tell you that you did, without knowing it, speak like an oracle when you said that, in order to have the honor of being a true Sicilian, one must be a monk in my convent, or a brigand on the mountain. I should prefer that you would be one or the other, rather than a cosmopolitan artist as you aspire to be. Listen to a story, and try to understand it:

"There was once in Sicily a poor devil, but blessed with a vivid imagination and a certain amount of courage, who, being unable to endure the disasters by which his

country was overwhelmed, took his gun one fine morning and went into the mountains, resolved to lose his own life, or to destroy one by one as many of the enemy as possible, pending the day when he could fall upon them in a body with the outlaws whom he joined. They formed a large and select band. Their leader was a noble, the last descendant of one of the greatest families of the country—Prince Cæsar de Castro-Reale. Remember that name. You may never have heard it, but a time will come when it will have more interest for you.

"In the woods and mountains the prince had taken the name of *Destatore*,* by which name he was known, loved, and feared for ten years, nobody suspecting that he was the young and brilliant nobleman who had run through his fortune at Palermo, and led a most dissipated life with his friends and mistresses.

"Before speaking of the poor devil who turned brigand from patriotic despair, I must say a few words of the noble patrician who had become a leader of brigands for the same reason. It will assist you to a knowledge of your country and your countrymen. *Il Destatore* was a man of thirty years, handsome, well-educated, lovable, brave and generous,—he had all the characteristics of a hero; but he was persecuted and crushed by the Neapolitan government, who detested him particularly because of the influence he exerted over the common people. He resolved to put an end to the life he was leading, to consume the balance of his fortune, which was reduced every day by taxes to the profit of the enemy; in short, to drown his sorrow in drunkenness, and to kill himself or brutalize himself in debauchery.

"He succeeded only in ruining himself. His robust

* He who slumbers not.

health withstood all sorts of excess, his sorrow survived his dissipation, and when he found that, instead of falling asleep, he became intensely excited in his cups, that a frantic rage took possession of him, and that it would be necessary for him to run a sword through his body, or, as he said, to eat à la Neapolitan, he disappeared and became a bandit. He was supposed to have been drowned, and his inheritance never caused his nephews any great embarrassment or afforded much profit to the authorities.

"Thereafter he was a tiger, a devouring lion, who spread terror through the country districts and avenged his fatherland in the bloodiest way. The poor devil whom I mentioned at the outset of my story became passionately attached to him, and served him with fanatical loyalty. He never stopped to think whether he was *worshipping the past*, or bending the knee to a man who deemed himself superior to him, but who was only his equal before God; whether he was fighting and risking his life for the benefit of a *master*, who might prove to be *ungrateful and despotic;* whether, after destroying the foreign tyranny, as they hoped to do, they would fall again under the yoke of the *old prejudices*, the *old abuses*, the nobles, and the monks. No, all those shades of distrust were too subtle for such a straightforward and simple mind as his. To beg would have seemed a degradation to him in those days; and as for work! why he had never done anything in his life but work, and work zealously, for he loved work, and was not afraid of it. But I do not know whether you have noticed as yet that in Sicily every man does not work who wants to. Although we have the richest and most fertile soil in the world, taxation has destroyed commerce, agriculture, all the industries and all the arts. The man of whom I speak had sought the hardest, roughest,

varieties of labor in the salt marshes, in the mines, even in the very bowels of the earth, which, on the surface, was devastated and neglected. Work was lacking everywhere, and all the enterprises in which he had been employed being abandoned, one after another, he was reduced to begging alms of his fellows who were as badly off as he, or to stealing. He preferred to *take* openly.

"But in the *Destatore's* band they took with discernment and justice. They maltreated and held to ransom none but enemies of the country or traitors. They had a secret understanding with every well-meaning or unfortunate man. They hoped to form a party large enough to attempt to seize one of the three principal cities, Palermo, Catania, or Messina.

"But Palermo, before placing confidence in us, demanded that we should be led by a noble; and as the *Destatore* was supposed to be an adventurer of low birth, he was rejected. If he had told his true name, it would have been worse. He was execrated throughout the country for his previous conduct, and that was a difficulty for which he could blame no one but himself.

"At Messina our proposals were rejected, on the plea that the Neapolitan government had done great things for the commerce of that city, and that, all things considered, peace at any price, with flourishing trade and the hope of growing rich, was preferable to a patriotic war with confusion and anarchy. At Catania they told us that they could not do anything without the concurrence of Messina, and would not do anything without that of Palermo. In fact they definitely refused to assist us in any way; and, after putting us off from year to year, they informed us that the trade of brigand had gone out of fashion, and that it was very bad taste to persist in it when we could sell out to the government and make our

fortunes in its service. They forgot to add, it is true, that, in order to resume his place in society, it would have been necessary for the Prince of Castro-Reale to become the enemy of his country and accept some military or civil post, the duties of which consisted in dispersing insurrections with cannon, and in pursuing, denouncing, and hanging his old comrades.

"The *Destatore*, seeing that his mission was at an end, and that, in order to live by his gun, he must thenceforth prey upon his fellow-countrymen, fell into a state of profound depression. Wandering among the wildest ravines on the island, and making bold forays, sometimes to the very gates of the cities, he lived for a time upon foreign travellers who were rash enough to visit the island. That trade was not worthy of him, for those foreigners were, for the most part, entirely free from blame for our ills, and so utterly incapable of defending themselves, that it was a pity to rob them. The brave fellows who followed him were disgusted with such wretched business, and every day brought its quota of desertions. To be sure those scrupulous fellows did worse when they left him; for some, being frowned upon everywhere, relapsed into idleness and poverty; others were forced to join the forces of the government, who considered them good soldiers, and made gendarmes and spies of them.

"Thus there remained with the *Destatore* only the more determined malefactors, who robbed and murdered, without scrutiny, everyone who came in their way. A single one was still honest, and refused to take part in this highwayman's business. It was the poor devil whose story I am telling you. Nor on the other hand would he leave his unfortunate captain; he loved him, and his heart was broken at the idea of abandoning him to traitors who would murder him some fine morning when they had no

one to rob, or would force him into useless crimes for their own gratification.

"The *Destatore* did full justice to his poor friend's devotion. He had appointed him his lieutenant—an absurd title in a band which now consisted of only a handful of knaves. He still allowed him to tell him the truth sometimes, and to give him good advice; but as a general rule he drove him away angrily, for the leader's temper became more and more soured from day to day, and the savage virtues which he had acquired in the days of enthusiasm and gallant exploits gave way to the vices of the past, children of despair, ill-omened guests which resumed possession of his storm-beaten soul.

"Drunkenness and lust took possession of him, as in the early days of idleness and discouragement. He fell below himself, and one day—an accursed day, which will never be blotted from my memory—he committed a terrible crime, a dastardly, detestable crime! If I had witnessed it, I would have killed him on the spot. But the *Destatore's* last remaining friend did not learn of it until the next day; and on that next day he left him, after bitterly upbraiding him for his infamy.

"Thereupon that poor devil, having no one to love, and being unable to do anything for his unhappy country, began to wonder what was going to become of him. His heart, still ardent and youthful, turned toward religion, and being of the opinion that an honest monk, thoroughly imbued with the ideas of the Bible, might do a good work, preach virtue to the powerful, give instruction and assistance to the poor and the ignorant, he assumed the frock of a Capuchin, received the lesser orders, and retired to this convent. He accepted the duty of mendicancy imposed upon his order, as an expiation of his sins, and found it preferable to pillage, in that he

applied thereafter to the rich in behalf of the poor, without violence and without cunning. It is inferior in a certain sense; it is less sure and less expeditious. But, all things considered, a man who wants to do the greatest possible amount of good should be a brigand in his youth; and he who simply wants to do the least possible harm should be a monk in his old age: you said so yourself.

"There is my story; do you understand it?"

"Perfectly, uncle; it is very interesting indeed, and, in my eyes, the principal hero of the romance is not the Prince of Castro-Reale, but the monk who is speaking to me."

XXII

THE FIRST STEP ON THE MOUNTAIN

Fra Angelo and his nephew were silent for a few moments. The monk was absorbed by the bitter yet glorious memories of his younger days. Michel gazed at him with delight; and, no longer wondering at the martial air and muscular strength concealed beneath the frock, mused with the admiration of an artist upon the strange poesy of that life of devotion to a single idea. If there was something abnormal and, to a certain extent, entertaining in the history of the Capuchin, who still boasted of his life as a bandit and seriously regretted it, there was something truly noble in the way in which the ex-brigand preserved his individual dignity, compromised as it had been in such extraordinary adventures.

Dagger or crucifix in hand, slaying traitors in the forest or begging for the poor at the gates of palaces, he was always the same, proud, ingenuous, unbending in his ideas, seeking to do good by the most vigorous methods, detesting cowardly acts with such intensity that he was still quite capable of punishing them with his own hand, utterly unable to understand the selfish motives by which the world is governed, or to believe that any man would not be ready at any moment to attempt the impossible rather than palter with the expedients suggested by cold circumspection.

"Why do you admire the secondary hero of my story?" he said to his nephew when he emerged from his reverie. "Self-sacrifice and patriotism must amount to something in your eyes, for that man had no other motive, and, in the present state of society, would have been only a poor fool—perhaps a lunatic."

"Yes, uncle, sincere devotion and the sacrifice of one's whole individuality to an idea are noble things, and if I had known you in those days—if I had been a man grown—I should probably have followed you into the mountains. I might have been less devotedly attached than you were to the Prince of Castro-Reale, but I trust I should have had the same illusions and the same love for the cause of my country."

"Really, young man?" said Fra Angelo, fixing his penetrating eyes upon Michel's face.

"Really, uncle," the young man replied, proudly raising his head, and sustaining that searching glance with the assurance of conviction.

"And is it too late now to attempt anything, my poor boy?" said Fra Angelo, with a sigh. "Has the time passed when we can believe in the triumph of the truth, and is the new society, which I have had no better

chance to study in my cloister than in my bandit's cave, determined to allow itself to be crushed forever?"

"I hope not, uncle. If I thought so, it seems to me that I should no longer have any blood in my veins, inspiration in my brain, or love in my bosom, and that I should no longer be capable of being an artist. But still we must recognize the fact that society is not what it must have been in this island at the beginning of your enterprise. Even if it has taken some steps toward intellectual discoveries, it is certain that the impulses of the heart have lost their energy."

"And you call that progress?" exclaimed the Capuchin, sorrowfully.

"No, far from it," Michel replied; "but how can those who are born during this state of society breathe any other air than that in which they were born, or entertain other ideas than those which have been forced into them? Must we not yield to the evidence, and bend our necks to the yoke of reality? Did not you yourself, my excellent uncle, when you passed from the exciting life of a free adventurer to the inflexible discipline of the cloister, did not you find that society was not what you thought, and that it was no longer possible to effect anything by violence?"

"Alas! that is true!" replied the monk. "During the ten years that I passed in the mountains, I did not know what revolutions were taking place in the manners of civilized mankind. When the *Destatore* had sent me into the cities with his agents, to try to make satisfactory terms with the nobles whom he had known as loyal patriots, and with the rich and well-educated middle class citizens whom he had known as ardent liberals, I was forced to the conviction that those people were no longer the same, that they had brought up their children with

other ideas, that they no longer cared to risk their fortunes and their lives in those hazardous undertakings in which only faith and enthusiasm can perform miracles. Yes, yes, the world had progressed—backward, according to my idea. People no longer talked of anything but making money, of fighting monopolies, of establishing competition, of founding new industries. They all deemed themselves rich already, they were in such haste to become so, and the government could purchase whomsoever it pleased, by the promise of the most trifling privilege. Yes, they had but to promise, to hold out hopes of fortune, and the most ardent patriots pounced upon those hopes, saying: 'industry will give us back our liberty!'

"The common people also believed it, and every employer could bring his employés to the feet of the new masters, the poor creatures imagining that their arms were about to bring them in millions. It was a sort of fever, a universal mania. I sought men, I found only machines. I talked of the fatherland and honor, they replied by discussing sulphur and silk weaving. I went away disheartened, but uncertain, not daring to censure too severely what I had seen, and saying to myself that it was not for me, ignorant and uncivilized as I was, to pass judgment upon the new resources which these mysterious discoveries were going to create for my country.

"But since then, great heaven! I have seen the result of these fine promises so far as the common people are concerned! I have seen some shrewd fellows restore their own fortunes by ruining their friends and paying court to the ruling powers. I have seen many families of petty tradespeople attain great wealth; but I have seen honorable men persecuted more and more; I have seen, especially, and I see now every day, more beggars and more poor wretches without bread, without homes, with-

out education, without a future. And I ask myself what good you have done with your new ideas, your progress, your theories of equality! You despise the past, you spit upon the old abuses, and you have killed the future by creating new abuses more monstrous than the old. The best among you, the young men, are on the alert for the revolutionary doctrines of nations more advanced than ours. You consider yourselves highly enlightened, very strong, when you can say: 'No more nobles, no more priests, no more convents, no more of anything connected with the past!' And you do not see that you no longer have the poesy, the faith and the pride which gave life to the past.

"Let us see!" added the Capuchin, folding his arms over his heaving breast, and eyeing Michel with a half fatherly, half bullying, air: "you are a very young man, a child! You consider yourself very clever, because you know what people say and think in society at this moment. You look at this stupid monk, who passes the day breaking rock in order to set out an extra row of peppers or tomatoes on the lava next year, and you say:

"'That's a strange way for a man to pass his life! And yet this man was neither lazy nor dull. He might have been a lawyer or a tradesman, and have earned money like other men. He might have married, had children, and taught them to hold their own in society. He preferred to bury himself alive in a convent and beg! It is because he is under the influence of the past, and has always been the dupe of the old chimeras and old superstitions of his country!'

"Very good! now, do you know what I think as I look at you? I say to myself: 'Here is a young man who has come much in contact with the minds of other men, who has very quickly thrown off the fetters of his class,

who does not choose to share the sufferings of his native country, the labors of his kinsmen. He will succeed; he is a handsome youth, keener and more logical in his ideas and his words at eighteen than I was at thirty. He knows a multitude of things which had seemed useless to me and which I did not even suspect, until the leisure of the cloister enabled me to educate myself a little. He stands there, smiling at my enthusiasm, and, mounted on his sound sense, his premature experience, his knowledge of men, and his profound study of the science of personal interest, looks upon me in his mind as a teacher looks upon his pupil. He is the mature man; and I, an old brigand and old monk, am the fearless youth, the blind and artless child! Strange transposition! He represents the new generation, all for gold and glory; and I the dust of ruins, the silence of the tomb!'

"Very good! but let the tocsin sound, let the volcano rumble, let the people roar, let that black point which we see in the roadstead, and which is the ship of State, bristle with guns to destroy the city at the first breath of aspiration toward liberty; let the brigands come down from the mountains, let the flames soar aloft to the clouds; and in that last convulsion of the dying fatherland, the young artist will take his brushes, he will go and take his seat upon a hill, out of all danger, and he will paint a picture, saying to himself: 'What an unfortunate people, and what a magnificent spectacle! I must hasten to put it on canvas! in an instant this people will have ceased to exist, its last hour is striking!'

"Whereas the old monk will take his gun, which is not yet rusty; he will turn his sleeves back to the shoulder, and without stopping to ask himself what will be the result of it all, he will rush into the scrimmage and will fight for his countrymen until his crushed and trampled

body no longer resembles a human being. And I would rather die so, boy, than survive, as you will do, the destruction of my race!"

"My father! my father! do not believe it," cried Michel, conquered and carried off his feet by the Capuchin's exaltation. "I am not a coward! and if my Sicilian blood flowed sluggishly on foreign soil, it is quickened by the fiery breath which your breast exhales. Do not crush me beneath that terrible malediction! Take me in your arms and set me on fire with your flames. With you I feel really alive, and this new life intoxicates and enraptures me!"

"Good! here is an honest impulse at last!" said the monk, embracing him. "I like this better than the fine theories concerning art which you have persuaded your father to respect blindly."

"Forgive me, uncle," rejoined Michel, with a smile, "I do not surrender on that point. I will maintain with my last breath the dignity and importance of art. You said just now that in the midst of civil war I would coolly go and sit down in a corner, to paint episodes of the conflict instead of fighting. I would fight, I beg you to believe, and I would fight hard if the object were to drive out the enemy. I would gladly lay down my life; glory would come to me more quickly so than I shall attain it by studying painting, and I love glory: in that respect I fear that I am incorrigible. But if I were in truth doomed to survive the downfall of my people after fighting in vain for their triumph, it is probable that I should collect my painful reminiscences and paint many pictures, to reproduce and perpetuate the memory of those bloody catastrophes. The more excited and desperate I was, the better and more striking my work would be. It would speak to men's hearts; it would arouse admiration for our

heroism, pity for our misfortunes, and I assure you that it might prove that I had served our cause better with my brush than I had done with my gun."

"Very good! very good!" rejoined the monk, with an ingenuous outburst of sympathy. "That is well said and well thought. We have a brother here who is a sculptor, and I consider that his work is no less useful to the cause of religion than mine is to the convent when I break up this lava. But that brother has faith, and he can carve the features of the Blessed Madonna without lowering the idea that we form of her. You will paint fine pictures, Michel; but only on the condition that you have taken part in the battle with heart and hand, and have been a zealous actor, not an unmoved spectator of events."

"Now we are altogether in accord, my father; there is no genius in art without conviction and without emotion: but as there is nothing more for us to dispute about, if you are content with me at last, pray tell me what is going on, and wherein you expect my assistance. Are we on the eve of some important undertaking?"

Fra Angelo was so excited that he had lost all notion of his surroundings. Suddenly his gleaming eyes filled with tears, his heaving breast fell with a deep sigh, his hands, which quivered as if they were feeling for pistols in his belt, fell back upon the cord around his waist and touched his chaplet.

"Alas! no," he said, glancing about with startled eyes, like a man suddenly aroused from sleep, "we are on the eve of nothing, and it may be that I shall die in my cell without ever renewing the priming of my gun. It was all a dream which you shared with me for an instant; but do not regret it, young man, it was a noble dream, and that instant, which did me inestimable good, may have made you a better man. The result of it has been that

I know you and esteem you. Now we are friends for life and death. Let us not despair of anything. Look at Ætna! it is peaceful and radiant; it is hardly smoking, and does not make a sound. To-morrow, perhaps, it may belch forth its burning lava again and utterly destroy the ground on which we stand. It is the emblem and the image of the Sicilian people, and the hour for *Vespers* may strike in the midst of dancing or of slumber. But the sun is sinking, and I have no more time to waste before telling you what I have to tell that concerns you. It is a matter entirely personal to you, of which I desired to speak with you, and it is a very serious matter. You cannot extricate yourself from it without my assistance and that of certain other persons who, like myself, are prepared to risk their liberty, their honor, and their lives, to save you."

"Is it possible, uncle?" cried Michel; "can I not take the risk alone? must you be involved in the mysterious perils which surround me without my knowledge? Is it not my father alone who is in danger, and cannot I save him?"

"Your father is in danger, too, but in less danger than you. Do not question me, but believe me. As I have told you, I detest unnecessary violence, but I shrink from nothing which is right and necessary. I must assist you, and I will assist you. You and your father can do nothing without the Capuchin of Ætna and the remnant of the *Destatore's* band. We are all ready. You will forgive me if, before assuming such grave risks, I desired to ascertain how far you were deserving of the devotion of which you are to reap the benefits. If you had proved to be an egotist simply, I would have assisted you to escape; but, if you are worthy of the name of Sicilian, we will assist you to triumph over destiny."

"And you will not explain ——"

"I will explain nothing that it is not necessary for you to know. I am not allowed to do otherwise; and you must remember one thing, namely, that by seeking to find out more than I am able to tell you, you will simply increase our risks and add to the complications of your own situation. Come, do me the favor to rely upon your uncle, and to overcome the vain and restless curiosity of childhood. Try to become a man between now and this evening, for this evening it may be necessary to act."

"I will ask but one thing of you, uncle, and that is to provide for my father's safety and my sister's before thinking of me."

"That is all done, my boy; at the first signal your father will seek refuge in the mountains, and your sister with the lady who gave a ball last night. Ah! the bell is ringing for service. I am going to ask the superior's permission to go out with my nephew on some family business. Wait for me at the door of our chapel."

"And suppose he should refuse you?"

"He would compel me to disobey him, which would grieve me deeply, I confess, not because of the penance to-morrow, but because I do not like to fail in my duty. The old soldier looks upon his orders as the supreme law."

Five minutes later, Fra Angelo joined Michel again at the door of the church.

"Granted," he said, "but I am commanded, in order to pay my debt to God, to perform an act of faith and say a short prayer before the altar of the Virgin. As I am excused from attending the evening services, the least I can do is to ask pardon from my greatest superior. Come and pray with me, young man; it can do you no harm, and will give you strength."

Michel followed his uncle to the foot of the altar. The setting sun made the stained-glass windows glow as with fire, and strewed with sapphires and rubies the flagged floor on which the Capuchin knelt. Michel knelt beside him, and watched him as he prayed with simple fervor. A flame-colored pane, whose reflection fell upon his shaven head, made it appear luminous and, as it were, aflame. The young painter was seized with respect and enthusiastic admiration as he looked upon that noble, strong and ingenuous face, which humbled itself in all sincerity in prayer; and he, too, moved to the depths of his heart, prayed for his country, his family and himself, with a simple faith and candor which he had not known since his childhood.

XXIII

THE DESTATORE

"May I venture to ask you where we are going, uncle?" queried Michel, when they had taken a dark and narrow path which led among the old olive-trees on the mountain.

"Certainly," replied Fra Angelo; "we are going to call upon the last real brigand in Sicily."

"There are some left then?"

"A few, although sadly deteriorated. They are still ready to fight for their country, and they keep alive the last spark of the sacred flame. However, I ought to tell you that they are a sort of cross between the gallant

fellows of long ago, who scrupulously refrained from taking a hair from the head of a good patriot, and the cutthroats of the present day, who kill and rob everyone they meet. These men discriminate when they can; but, as their business has become very bad, and as the police are more to be feared than in my time, they cannot always choose; so that I do not hold them up as beyond reproach; but, such as they are, they still have certain virtues which we should seek in vain elsewhere: fidelity to their oaths, remembrance of past services, the revolutionary spirit, love of country; in a word, all that remains of the chivalrous spirit of our old bands still casts a faint gleam in the hearts of a few poor fellows, who live by themselves, a half-sedentary, half-wandering life. That is to say, they are settled in villages or in the open country; they have their families there, and in some cases are supposed to be peaceable husbandmen, submissive to the law, and having no quarrel with the *campiere.** If any of them are suspected, or, perhaps, involved in some trouble, they are more wary, do not go to see their wives or children except at night, or else remove their homes to some almost inaccessible location. But the man whom we are going to see is still free from any direct persecution. He lives openly in a neighboring village, and can go where he pleases. You will not regret having made his acquaintance, and I give you leave to study his character, for he is a very interesting and remarkable person."

"Should I be too inquisitive if I asked you to tell me a little something about him beforehand?"

"Certainly you ought to be told about him, and I will tell you. But it is a momentous secret to place in your keeping, Michel, and it makes it necessary for me to tell

* The gendarmes or police of the island.

you another story. Do you know that I am going to place in your hands the fate of a man whom the police are hunting with all the energy and skill of which they are capable, and whose features and true name they have never succeeded in finding out in the six or seven years that have passed since he took up the *Destatore's* work? Tell me, my boy, have you never heard of the *Piccinino* and his band since you have been in Sicily?"

"It seems to me that I have. Yes, yes, uncle, my sister Mila has some fantastic stories about this Piccinino, who is the principal subject of conversation among the young silk-weavers of Catania. He is a redoubtable brigand, they say, who kidnaps women and kills men at the very gates of the city. I have never believed these fables."

"There is some truth at the bottom of all the popular legends," rejoined the monk. "The Piccinino exists and plies his trade. There are two men in him—the man whom the *campieri* pursue in vain, and the man whom no one dreams of suspecting. The man who leads hazardous expeditions and assembles, at a mysterious signal, all the *nottoloni** of any consequence, scattered all over the island, to employ them in more or less worthy enterprises; and the man who lives not far from this place, in a pretty country house, free from all molestation, and with the reputation of an intelligent, peaceably disposed man, opposed to bloody strife and advanced opinions. Well, within an hour you will be in that man's presence, you will know his true name, you will know his features, and you will share with only two other persons outside of the band which he commands the responsibility of his secret. You see that I treat you as a man, my child,

* People who attend to their business by night.

but one cannot realize the danger of another person until he has himself been exposed to it. Henceforth you will have to pay with your life for the slightest indiscretion, and, in addition, to commit something more than a dastardly act, a horrible crime, of which you will soon know the extent."

"All these warnings are unnecessary, uncle; it is enough for me to know that it would be an abuse of confidence."

"I believe it, and yet I am not so sure of your prudence that I do not feel that I must tell you everything which may increase it. Your father, Princess Agatha, perhaps your sister, and myself beyond any question—all of us—will have sacrificed life and honor for you, if you are false to the oath I require of you. Swear, therefore, upon all that you hold most sacred—upon the Holy Gospel—never to betray, even on the scaffold, the true name of the Piccinino."

"I swear it, uncle. Are you satisfied?"

"Yes."

"And will the Piccinino have the same confidence in my oath that you have?"

"Yes, although confidence is not a failing of his. But when I told him of your visit, I gave him guarantees which could not fail to satisfy him."

"Very good! Now tell me what the relations are to be between this man and myself?"

"Patience, boy! I promised you another story, and here it is:

"The *Destatore* having become addicted to wine in his last years——"

"So the *Destatore* is dead, is he, uncle? You did not tell me of his death."

"I will tell you about it, although it is a very painful

subject to me! I told you of an abominable crime that he committed. He surprised and carried off a girl,—a mere child,—who was walking with a nurse in this neighborhood, and set her free again in two hours. But, alas! two hours too late! No one witnessed his infamous act, but that very evening he boasted of it to me and sneered at my indignation. I was beside myself with horror and wrath, so that I cursed him, consigned him to the furies, and abandoned him to enter this convent, where I soon took the vows. I loved that man. I had been for many years under his influence; and when I saw him ruining and degrading himself, I feared that I might be led to follow his example. I determined to place between him and myself an insurmountable barrier. I became a monk; that was one of the most potent reasons for my decision.

"My desertion affected him more deeply than I expected. He came secretly to Bel Passo and resorted to every expedient—prayers and threats—to induce me to return. He was eloquent, because he had an ardent and sincere heart, despite his vagaries. I was inexorable, however, and I did my utmost to convert him. I am not eloquent; I was even less so at that time; but I felt so intensely all that I said to him—and faith had taken so strong a hold upon my heart—that my arguments made a profound impression upon him. I induced him to repair his crime as far as possible by marrying the innocent victim of his violence. I went to her by night and obtained her consent to look once more upon the detested brigand's features. They were married that night, secretly but legally, in the chapel before the altar where you prayed just now with me. And when he saw that beautiful, pale-cheeked, terrified maiden, the Prince of Castro-Reale was seized with remorse, and began to love

her who was destined always to abhor him! He entreated her to fly with him, and, irritated by her refusal, thought of abducting her. But I had given that child my word, and she displayed a strength of character and a pride far beyond her years. She told him that she would never see him again; and clinging to my gown and our prior's—a worthy man who carried all his secrets with him to the grave—she cried: 'You swore that you would not leave me alone with that man a minute, and would take me back to the door of my home as soon as the marriage ceremony was finished. Do not desert me, or I will beat out my brains on the steps of your church!'

"She would have done as she said, the noble-hearted girl! But I had sworn! I took her home in safety, and she never saw the *Destatore* again.

"As for him, his suffering was beyond words. Resistance inflamed his passion, and, for the first time in his life, he who had seduced and abandoned so many women learned what love is. But he also learned what remorse is, and from that day his mind was diseased. I hoped that he would be truly converted. I had no thought of making a monk of him like myself, but I wanted him to take up his old work, to renounce useless crimes, debauchery and folly. I tried to convince him that, if he should become once more the avenger of his country and the soul of our hope of deliverance, his young wife would forgive him and consent to share his painful but glorious destiny. Doubtless I myself would have thrown my frock to the dogs and followed him.

"But, alas! it would be too easy for men to mend their ways if crime and vice would relax their grasp upon their victims as readily as we desire. The *Destatore* was no longer himself; he had become too thoroughly the

man of the past. The remorse that I aroused in him disturbed his reason without appeasing his savage instincts. Sometimes a raving madman, sometimes timid and superstitious, he would pray one day in our humble chapel, bathed in tears; and the next day would return to his vomit—as the Scripture says. He tried to kill all his companions; he tried to kill me. He committed many more excesses, and one morning—it is hard for me to carry my story through to the end, Michel, it gives me so much pain!—one morning he was found dead at the foot of a cross, not far from our convent. He had blown out his brains with a pistol!"

"That was a horrible fate," said Michel, "and I do not know whether it is the tone of your voice, uncle, or the ghastly memories of the place where we are, but my emotions at this moment are most painful. It may be that I heard my father tell the story in my childhood, and that the memory of the terror it caused me then is revived by your words."

"I do not believe that your father ever mentioned it to you," said the Capuchin, after an interval of dismal silence. "I only speak of it because I must, my child; for the remembrance is more painful to me than to anybody on earth, and the place where we now are is by no means calculated to arouse cheerful thoughts in my mind. See, yonder is the cross whose base was drenched with his blood, and there I found him lying, sadly disfigured. It was I who dug his grave with my own hands under yonder rock in the bottom of the ravine. It was I who said the prayers which anybody else would have refused to say for him.

"Poor Castro-Reale, poor captain, poor fellow!" continued the Capuchin, baring his head and extending his arm in the direction of a great black rock which lay on

the brink of the stream about fifty feet below the road. May God, who is inexhaustible mercy and infinite kindness, forgive the errors of your life, as I forgive the sorrow you caused me! I no longer remember aught save your years of valor, your noble deeds, your lofty sentiments, and the ardent aspirations which we shared. God will not be more severe than a poor fellow like me, will he, Michel?"

"I do not believe in the everlasting resentment of the supreme and perfect Being who governs the world," replied the young man. "But let us go on, uncle; I am cold here, and I prefer to confess the strange weakness that I feel rather than remain an instant longer at the foot of this cross. I am afraid!"

"I had rather see you tremble than laugh in this spot!" replied the monk. "Come, give me your hand, and let us go on."

They walked for some time in silence; then Fra Angelo, as if he wished to divert Michel's thoughts, continued thus: "After the death of the *Destatore*, many people, women especially,—for he had seduced more than one—hurried to his hiding-place, hoping to obtain possession of what money he might have left there for the children whose father he was, or was supposed to be; but on the very morning of his suicide he had taken the booty remaining from his last expeditions and carried it to that one of his mistresses whom he loved best, or, to speak more accurately, whom he hated least; for, although he had many flames, he inspired even more, and all those women, forming a sort of ambulatory harem, annoyed and irritated him beyond measure. They all wanted him to marry them, for they did not know that he was married. Melina, of Nicolosi, alone never burdened him with her reproaches or her demands. She had loved him

sincerely; she had abandoned herself to him without resistance and without ulterior motives; she had given him a son whom he preferred to the twelve or fifteen bastards who were reared under his name among the mountains. Most of those bastards are still living, and boast, rightly or wrongly, that they belong to him. All are brigands to a greater or less extent. But the one whom the *Destatore* never denied, who resembles him in every feature, although his is a much reduced and blurred impression of the father's masculine and energetic beauty; the one who has grown to manhood with the design of succeeding to his work, with protection and resources to which the others can lay no claim, that one is the son of Melina, the young man whom we shall see very soon; he is the leader of the brigands to whom I have referred, some of whom are, as a matter of fact, his brothers; finally, he is the man whom you are to know under his true name, Carmelo Tomabene, who is also known as *The Piccinino*."

"And the girl whom Castro-Reale abducted, whom you married to him—will you not tell me her name, uncle?"

"Her name and her story are a secret which only three persons know to-day, she, myself, and one other. Stop there, Michel; no more questions on that subject. Let us return to the Piccinino, son of the Prince of Castro-Reale and of the peasant girl of Nicolosi.

"This intrigue of the *Destatore* was several years prior to his crime and his marriage. The treasure he left was not very considerable; but, as everything is relative, it was a fortune to Melina. She brought up her son as if she intended that he should rise above his position; in the bottom of her heart she longed to make a priest of him, and for several years I was his tutor and his guide. But he was barely fifteen years old when, having lost his mother, he left our convent and led a wandering life until

he attained his majority. He had always cherished the idea of hunting up his father's former companions, and organizing a new band with their aid; but, from respect for his mother's wishes, for I ought to say that he really loved her, he had worked to acquire an education as if he had, in fact, intended to devote himself to the priestly profession. When he had recovered his liberty, he made use of it without informing me of his purpose. He had always supposed that I would blame him. Later, he was compelled to entrust his secret to me and seek my advice.

"I was not sorry, I confess, to be rid of the guardianship of that young wolf, for he was the most untamable creature that I ever met. As fearless as his father, and even more intelligent, he is by instinct so cautious and cunning, and elusive, that I was uncertain at times whether I was dealing with the vilest of hypocrites or with the shrewdest diplomatist who ever tangled up the affairs of empires. He is a strange mixture of perfidy and honor, of magnanimity and vindictiveness. He has a portion of his father's virtues and good qualities. His vices and failings are of a different sort. Like his father, he is loyal in friendship, and his oath is sacred; but while his father, even when carried away by fierce passions, was always a true believer, and indeed devout in the depths of his heart, the son, if I am not mistaken, and if he has not changed, is the most placid and coolest atheist that ever lived. If he has passions, he gratifies them so secretly that they cannot be discovered. I know of but one, and that I have made no attempt to overcome,—it is hatred of the foreigner and love of country. That love is so intense that he carries it even to love of locality. Far from being a spendthrift like his father, he is economical and orderly, and owns a pretty little estate at Nicolosi, with a garden and some land, where he lives almost always alone, to all

appearance, when he is not on some secret expedition in the mountains. But he arranges his absences with so much caution, and receives his friends with so much mystery, that no one ever knows whether he is away from the house, or in his garden, smoking and reading. In order to preserve this skilfully managed freedom of action, he makes a practice of not replying or showing himself when anyone knocks at his door. So that, when he is ten leagues away, no one can say that he is not kept within the walls of his fortress by a fit of unsociability.

"He has retained the costume, and, so far as appears, the habits of a wealthy peasant, and, although he is very well educated and very eloquent on occasion, although he is fitted for any career, and capable of distinguishing himself in many, he has such aversion for society and the laws by which it is governed among us, that he prefers to remain a bandit. To be simply a *villano** in easy circumstances would not satisfy him. He is energetic and ambitious, he has a genius for the ruses of warfare, and a passion for adventures. Although it is a part of his plan to conceal his shrewdness and his learning, those qualities reveal themselves in spite of him, and he has great influence in his village. He is looked upon there as an original character, but they think highly of his advice, and consult him on every subject. He has made it his duty to oblige everybody, because it is his policy to have no enemies. He explains his frequent absences and the numerous visits he receives as being connected with a small business in grain, which requires journeys into the interior and somewhat extensive connections. He carefully conceals his patriotism, but he investigates and knows all about other people's, and at the first real uprising, he would have but to wave his hand to raise the whole popu-

* That is to say, a *villain* or serf.

lation of the mountain, and the mountain would march with him."

"I can understand that this man is a hero in your eyes, uncle, while you have difficulty in esteeming one whose qualities are so faintly outlined as mine."

"I esteem the quality of words, not their number," replied the Capuchin. "You have said two or three words which satisfy me, and as for my hero, as you call him, he is so far from being lavish with them that I have had to judge him by deeds rather than by speech. I, myself, rarely speak of matters upon which I feel very strongly, and if you find me prolix to-day, it is because I am obliged to tell you in two hours what I have had no chance to tell you in the eighteen years that you have been in this world, a stranger to me. However, reserve is not a defect in my eyes. I loved Castro-Reale as I shall never love anybody else; and we passed whole days together, by ourselves, without speaking a word. He was suspicious, as every true Sicilian should be, and so long as he distrusted himself and others, he had a noble heart and a noble spirit."

"The young man we are going to see must be very deeply attached to you, uncle, since you are sure of finding him prepared to receive me?"

"If he loves anyone on earth, I am that one, although I scolded and worried him well when he was my pupil. However, I am not perfectly certain that he will grant what I have to ask him in your behalf. He will have to overcome some repugnance; but I hope for the best."

"Doubtless he knows all that you will not allow me to know myself of my affairs and my destiny?"

"He? he knows nothing whatsoever of them, and he shall know nothing before you do. The little that you are both to know for the present, I will tell you both.

After that, it may be that the Piccinino will guess more than he should. His penetration is very keen; but whatever he may guess, he will never tell you; and he will never ask you what he wants to find out; my mind is at rest so far as that is concerned. Now, silence; we are coming out of the woods into a cultivated and settled part of the mountain. We must be seen by as few people as possible on our way to the place where our man awaits us."

They walked silently and cautiously along hedges and clumps of trees, keeping in the shadow and avoiding trodden paths; and in the gathering dusk they soon reached the Piccinino's abode.

XXIV

IL PICCININO

On that side of the mountain which Fra Angelo and Michel had been constantly ascending for two hours, the large, thickly populated village of Nicolosi is the last civilized point at which the traveller who wishes to visit the top of Ætna stops for breath before entering the grand and imposing region of forests. This second belt is called *Silvosa* or *Nemorosa*, and the cold is intense there. The vegetation then becomes depressingly wild and more sparse, until it finally disappears altogether under lichens and heaps of gravel, beyond which all is snow, sulphur, and smoke.

Nicolosi and the magnificent landscape surrounding it

were already enveloped in the evening mist when Michel tried to form some idea of the place where he was. The imposing mass of Ætna was of the same uniform shade, and he could barely distinguish, a mile above him, the frowning peak of *Monte-Rosso*, that subaltern volcano, one of the twenty or thirty sons of Ætna, extinct or recently opened furnaces, which rear their heads like a battery of artillery at its foot. It was Monte-Rosso that opened its black maw, less than two centuries ago, to vomit forth that death-dealing lava with which the bottom of the bay of Catania is still furrowed. To-day the peasants raise grapes and olives on débris which seems to be burning still.

The Piccinino's house stood by itself on the mountain, about half a mile from the village, from which it was separated by a steep ravine; it was on the uppermost edge of a fertile tract, where the atmosphere was soft and balmy. A few hundred feet higher it began to be cold, and the terrors of the desert were foreshadowed by the absence of tilled land, and by ridges of lava so numerous and so broad that the mountain seemed inaccessible in that direction. Michel observed that the situation was particularly favorable to the purposes of a man who was half citizen, half outlaw. At home, he could enjoy all the comforts of life; on leaving his home, he at once escaped from the presence of his fellow-men and the requirements of the law.

The hill, the slope of which was very abrupt on one side, but gentle and fertile on the other, was covered to its very summit with luxuriant vegetation, whose mysterious exuberance was sedulously fostered by an industrious and intelligent hand. Carmelo Tomabene's garden was renowned for its beauty and the great abundance of its fruits and flowers. But its entrance was jealously

guarded, and it was enclosed on all sides by high verdure-covered palisades. The house, which was of considerable size and well built, although without apparent striving for effect, stood upon the site of a small abandoned fort. Some fragments of thick walls, and the base of a square tower, which had been utilized to strengthen and enlarge the new building, which bore the marks of extensive repairs, gave to the modest structure an air of solidity, and of semi-rustic, semi-seignioral importance. However, it was simply the dwelling of a well-to-do farmer, although one felt that a man of refined habits and tastes might find life enjoyable therein.

Fra Angelo approached the gate, and pulled a bell-cord, which, starting among the honeysuckles in which the gate was embowered, followed a long vine-clad arbor and was connected with a bell inside the house; but the sound of the bell was so deadened that it could not be heard outside. The cord was not visible amid the foliage, and one needed to be previously cognizant of its existence to make use of it. The monk pulled the cord three times, at carefully measured intervals; then five times, then twice, then three times again; after which he folded his arms for five minutes, when he repeated the signals in the same order and with the same care. One ring more or less and the mysterious proprietor might have allowed them to wait all night without admitting them.

At last the garden gate was opened. A small man, wrapped in a cloak, approached, took Fra Angelo by the hand, whispered to him for some moments, then turned to Michel, bade him enter, and walked before them, after closing the gate. They walked through the long arbor which formed a cross extending the whole length and width of the garden, and entered the house through a

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The Piccinino
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mitted with more coquetry than vexation.* It is impossible to imagine a more slender and delicate, and, at the same time, more perfect figure, than that young man's. Admirably proportioned, and modelled like an antique bronze, he made up for his lack of muscular strength by extreme suppleness. He was reputed to be without a compeer in all bodily exercises, although he was dependent solely upon his address, his coolness, his agility, and the unerring accuracy of his glance. No one could tire him at walking, or overtake him at running. He climbed precipices with the self-possession of a chamois; he was as good a shot with the rifle as with the pistol or the sling; and in all sports of that sort he was so sure of winning all the prizes that he had ceased to take the trouble to compete. He was an excellent horseman and a fearless swimmer; in fact, there was no method of locomotion or of fighting in which he was not certain to display a marked superiority to anyone who ventured to try conclusions with him. Being fully alive to the advantages of physical strength in a mountainous country, and with the life of an adventurer before him, he had striven in early years to acquire what nature seemed to have denied him in that regard. He had exercised and developed his muscles with incredible energy and persistence, and had succeeded in making his fragile frame the trusty slave and obedient instrument of his will.

And yet, seeing him reclining thus upon his couch, one might have taken him for a sickly or indolent woman. Michel did not know that, after travelling twenty leagues on foot during the day, he systematically rested for a

* The Piccinino is a friendly diminutive which the mountaineers might well have given him because of his small size. But the phrase *piccin-piccino* signifies the act of hiding in order to prove an *alibi*.

certain number of hours, and that he had watched and studied himself so closely in every respect that he knew exactly how many moments he must pass in a horizontal position in order to escape the annoyance of a lame back and legs.

His face was of a peculiar type of beauty: it was the Siculo-Arabian* type in all its purity. Extraordinary sharpness of outline, a somewhat exaggerated oriental profile, long, languishing, velvety black eyes, a shrewd and lazy smile, a wholly feminine grace, and an indefinable gentleness and coldness which it was impossible to explain at the first glance.

The Piccinino was dressed with extreme care and scrupulous neatness. He wore the picturesque costume of the peasants of the mountain, but it was made of fine, light materials. His breeches, short and tight-fitting, were of a soft woollen fabric, with silk stripes, yellow and brown. His bare leg, white as alabaster, was visible above his scarlet *spadrilles*. His shirt was of embroidered linen, trimmed with lace, and afforded a glimpse of a heavy gold chain, intertwined with hair, upon his breast. His sash was of green silk stitched with silver. He was arrayed from head to foot in smuggled garments, or something worse; for if you had examined the marks on his linen, you might have convinced yourself that it came from the last valise he had robbed.

While Michel was contemplating with admiration, mingled with some inward irony, the ease with which that well-favored youth rolled a cigarette of Algerian tobacco in his fingers, slender and tapering as a Bedouin's, Fra Angelo, who seemed neither surprised nor annoyed by his reception, made a circuit of the room, bolted the door, and, having inquired if they were quite alone in the

* That is to say, modified Arabian, as found in Sicily.

house, to which query the Piccinino replied in the affirmative with a nod, he began thus:

"I thank you, my son, for not compelling me to wait for this appointment. I have come to ask a favor at your hands: are you able and willing to devote a few days to it?"

"A few days?" repeated the Piccinino, in such a soft voice that Michel was fain to glance anew at the muscles of steel in his legs in order to be sure that it was not a woman who spoke; but the tone of the voice signified too clearly to be misunderstood: "You are jesting!"

"I said a few days," rejoined the monk, calmly. "You will have to go down the mountain, follow this young man, my nephew, to Catania, and stay by him until you have succeeded in relieving him from an enemy who is tormenting him."

The Piccinino turned slowly toward Michel, and stared at him as if he had not previously seen him; then, taking from his belt a richly-mounted stiletto, he presented it to him with an almost imperceptible smile of irony and contempt, as if to say: "You are old enough and strong enough to defend yourself."

Michel, annoyed at being placed in such a position, was about to make a sharp retort, when Fra Angelo cut him short, placing his iron hand on his shoulder.

"Be quiet, my boy," he said; "you do not know what I am talking about, and there is no occasion for you to speak. My friend," he continued, addressing the bandit, "if my nephew were not a man and a Sicilian, I should not introduce him to you. I am going to tell you what we expect of you, unless you tell me beforehand that you cannot or will not help us."

"Padre Angelo," replied the bandit, taking the monk's hand, and putting it to his lips with a caressing gesture

and an affectionate glance that changed the character of his face entirely, "whatever you may ask, I am always willing to do for you. But no man can do all that he is willing to do. So I must know what it is."

"A man annoys us."

"I understand."

"We do not wish to kill him."

"You are unwise."

"By killing him we ruin ourselves; by putting him out of the way we are saved."

"He is to be kidnapped then?"

"Yes, but we do not know how to go about it."

"What! *you* do not know, Padre Angelo?" said the Piccinino with a smile.

"I should have known in the old days," replied the Capuchin. "I had friends and places of shelter. Now, I am a monk."

"You are foolish," rejoined the bandit with undisturbed tranquillity. "So, I am to kidnap a man, am I? Is he very stout, very heavy?"

"He is very light," replied the monk, who apparently understood that metaphor, "and no one will give you a ducat for his skin."

"In that case, good-evening, father; I can't take him alone and put him in my pocket like a handkerchief. I must have men, and they are not to be had for nothing, as in your day."

"You don't understand me; you may fix the compensation of your men yourself, and they shall be paid."

"Do you make yourself responsible for that, father?"

"I do."

"You alone?"

"I alone. And, so far as you are concerned, if the

affair had not been a magnificent one, I should not have selected you."

"Well, we will see about it next week," rejoined the bandit, in order to obtain more ample information as to the profits of the affair.

"In that case, we will say nothing more about it," said the monk, hurt by his distrust; "we must go forward at once or not at all."

"At once? What about a chance to collect my men, persuade them, and give them their instructions?"

"You can do it to-morrow morning, and to-morrow night they can be at their posts."

"I see that you are in no great hurry, or you would have told me to start to-night. If you can wait until to-morrow, you can wait a fortnight."

"No; for I intend to take you away with me now, send you to a certain villa where you will talk with one of the persons interested in the success of the affair, and give you until to-morrow night to inspect the locality, become acquainted with all necessary details, set up your batteries, notify your men, station them, arrange for allies in the citadel. Bah! it is more time than you need! At your age I wouldn't have asked your father for half of it."

Michel saw that the Capuchin had touched the right chord at last; for when he was appealed to as the son of the Prince of Castro-Reale, a title which nobody dared or chose to give him openly, the Piccinino started, sat up and sprang to his feet as if he were ready to start at once. But suddenly he put his hand to his leg and fell back on the couch.

"It is impossible," he said, "I am in too much pain."

"What is the matter?" asked Fra Angelo. "Are you wounded? Is that spent ball of last year still troubling you? In the old days we used to march with bullets in

our bodies. Your father did thirty leagues without thinking of having the one extracted that he received in the thigh at Leon-Forte; but the young men of to-day need a year to be cured of a bruise."

Michel thought that his uncle had gone a little too far, for the Piccinino resumed his recumbent attitude with a gesture of profound indignation, stretched himself on his back, puffed away at his cigarette, and maliciously left to the good priest the embarrassing necessity of continuing the conversation.

But Fra Angelo was perfectly sure that the idea of a supply of ducats had appealed to the young bandit's unsentimental mind, and he continued without the slightest hesitation:

"I give you half an hour, my son, if you absolutely need it; half an hour is a long while for the blood that flows in your veins! then we will all three start."

"Who is this youngster, pray?" said the Piccinino, indicating Michel with the end of his finger, but without removing his eyes from the wall.

"He is my nephew, as I have told you; and Fra Angelo's nephew is to be relied on. But he doesn't know the country, and has not the necessary connections for an affair of this sort."

"Is the *signorino* afraid of compromising himself?"

"No, signor!" cried Michel, irritated beyond endurance, and unable to bear longer the bandit's insolence and the restraint which his uncle imposed upon him. The bandit turned, looked him in the face with his long eyes, which seemed to turn up a little toward the temples, and whose mocking expression was sometimes intolerable. But when he saw Michel's animated face and pale lips, he assumed a more amiable expression, albeit a little suspicious still, and said, offering him his hand:

"Let us be friends, at all events, until we have no other enemies on our hands; that is our wisest course."

As Michel was seated at some distance, he would have had to rise to take that hand, extended with a kingly gesture. He smiled and did not move, at the risk of displeasing his uncle and losing the fruit of their expedition.

But the monk was not sorry to see Michel adopt that attitude with respect to the bandit. The latter understood that he had no weak-spirited creature to deal with, and, rising with an effort, he went to him and took his hand.

"You are cruel, my young master," he said, "to refuse to take two steps toward a man who is completely tired out. You haven't travelled twenty leagues to-day, and you insist upon my starting off again when I have had barely two hours' rest!"

"At your age," said the unrelenting monk, "I used to walk twenty leagues a day, and not take time to sup before starting again. Well, have you decided? Shall we start?"

"You care a good deal about it, don't you? Are you personally interested in the affair?"

"I care about it as I do about my everlasting salvation, and the affair is of the deepest interest to the persons who are dearer to me than anybody else on earth since your father died. My brother is in danger, as well as this excellent young man, for whom I demand your sincere and loyal friendship."

"Have I not shaken his hand?"

"Therefore I count upon you. When I see that you are ready, I will tell you something that will be a more enticing bait to you than gold or glory."

"I am ready. Is it an enemy of the country who is to be killed?"

"I told you that there is nobody to be killed; you forget that I serve the God of peace and mercy. But there is some one to be thwarted, some one whose treacherous plans must be utterly foiled; and that man is a spy and a traitor."

"His name?"

"Will you come?"

"Am I not on my feet?"

"Abbé Ninfo."

The Piccinino began to laugh, a silent laugh in which there was something ghastly.

"May I be permitted to thwart him?" he asked.

"Morally, yes. But not a drop of blood must be shed!"

"Morally! good, I will exert my wits. Courage is not current coin with that fellow; but as we have made our bargain, or nearly so, it is time to explain to me the motive of this abduction."

"I will explain it to you, and you can reflect upon it as we walk."

"Impossible. I cannot do two things at once. I reflect only when my body is at rest."

And he coolly lay down again after relighting his cigarette.

Fra Angelo saw clearly enough that he would not allow himself to be led into action with his eyes closed.

"You know," he said, with no indication of impatience, "that Ninfo is the tool, the spy, the inseparable companion of a certain cardinal?"

"Hieronymo de Palmarosa?"

"You know also that my older brother, Pier-Angelo, was forced to leave Sicily eighteen years ago?"

"I know it. It was his own fault! My father was still alive. He might have joined him instead of abandoning his country."

"You are mistaken; your father was dead. You were an infant, I was a monk! There was nothing to be done here."

"Go on."

"My brother returned, as you know, a year ago; and his son, Michelangelo here, returned a week ago."

"What for?"

"To assist his father in his trade and his country on occasion. But there is already a denunciation hanging over him as well as over his father. The cardinal still has his memory, and does not forgive. Ninfo is prepared to act in his name."

"What are they waiting for?"

"I don't know why the cardinal is waiting so long before dying, but I can say that Ninfo is waiting for the cardinal's death."

"Why?"

"In order to seize his papers before there is time to put seals on them and notify his heiress."

"Who is the heiress?"

"Princess Agatha de Palmarosa."

"Ah! yes," said the bandit, changing his position, "a beautiful woman, so they say."

"That has nothing to do with the affair. But do you understand now why it is necessary that Abbé Ninfo should disappear during the cardinal's last moments?"

"So that he cannot seize the papers, you said. He may cheat Princess Agatha out of important documents, abstract a will. It is a serious matter for her. She is very rich, is she not? Thanks to her father's and uncle's *loyal opinions*, the government has left her all her property, and does not crush her life out with forced contributions."

"She is very rich, so that it is a great opportunity for you, for she is no less generous than rich."

"I understand. And then, she is a very beautiful woman!"

His insistence upon that consideration sent a shudder of anger through Michel's veins; the bandit's impertinence seemed intolerable to him; but Fra Angelo was not disturbed by it. He believed that it was simply a trick of the Piccinino's, to conceal his rapacity beneath an air of gallantry.

"So I am to act for your brother and nephew incidentally," continued the bandit, "while in reality I am to rescue the Princess of Palmarosa's future fortune by laying hands upon the suspicious person of Abbé Ninfo? Is that it?"

"That is it," the monk replied. "The signora has to look out for her interests, and I for my family. That is why I have advised her to seek your assistance, and why I consented to convey her request."

The Piccinino seemed to reflect a moment; then, suddenly throwing himself back on his cushions, he exclaimed, in a voice broken by peals of hearty laughter:

"A most excellent story! This is one of the most attractive adventures in which I have ever taken part!"

XXV

THE DESTATORE'S CROSS

This outburst of merriment, which seemed exceedingly insolent to Michel, alarmed the monk at last; but, giving him no time to question him, the Piccinino resumed his seriousness as abruptly as he had laid it aside.

"The affair becomes clearer," he said. "One point is still obscure; why does Ninfo wait for the cardinal to die before denouncing your kinsmen?"

"Because he knows that the princess is their protector," the Capuchin replied; "that she has affection and esteem for the honest old artisan who has been working in her palace for a year past, and that, to save them from persecution, she would allow herself to be bled by that infamous priest. So he says to himself that when the cardinal is dead he will have that noble lady's fate in his hands absolutely, and that he will be at liberty to ruin her to his own profit. Doesn't it seem better to you that the Princess Agatha, who is a good Sicilian, should inherit the cardinal's property peaceably, and recompense handsomely the services of a gallant fellow like yourself, than that she should spend her money to buy the silence of a venomous reptile like Ninfo?"

"That is my opinion. But how can you be sure that the will has not been already abstracted?"

"We know on good authority that it cannot have been yet."

"I must be certain of it! for I don't choose to exert myself, and then obtain nothing that is of any value."

"What does it matter if your pay is the same?"

"Ah! Brother Angelo," said the Piccinino, rising on his elbow and assuming an air of pride which made his listless eyes gleam for an instant, "for what do you take me? It seems to me that you have forgotten me in some measure. Am I a *bravo*, to be paid by the job or by the day? I have always flattered myself upon being a loyal friend, a man of honor, a devoted partisan; and lo and behold! apparently ashamed of the pupil you trained, you treat me like a mercenary, ready to do anything for a little gold! Disabuse yourself of that idea, in God's name. I do justice fortuitously, as my father did; and if I sometimes work on different lines from those he followed—if, conforming to the spirit of the age we live in, I use my shrewdness more often than my courage—I am none the less high-spirited and independent. Being more useful and more in request than a notary, lawyer or doctor, if I put a high price on my services, or give them *gratis*, according to the means of those who seek them, I have no love for my art and no respect for my own intelligence. I shall never waste my time and trouble in earning money without guarding the interests of my clients; and, just as the famous advocate refuses to undertake a cause which he is sure of losing, just as a captain refuses to risk his men in an unnecessary action, just as an honest doctor ceases his visits when it is no longer in his power to relieve his patient, so do I, my father, refuse your offers, for they do not satisfy my conscience."

"There was no need of your saying all that to me," said Fra Angelo, still as calm as ever. "I know what

sort of man you are, and I should consider that I degraded myself by seeking the aid of a man whom I did not esteem."

"In that case," replied the Piccinino, with increasing excitement, "why do you lack confidence in me? Why do you tell me only a part of the truth?"

"You want me to tell you where the cardinal's will is concealed? That I do not know, nor have I ever thought of asking."

"That is impossible."

"I swear to you before God, boy, that I have no idea. I know that it is out of Ninfo's reach for the present, and that he cannot obtain possession of it while the cardinal lives except with his assent."

"And how do you know that he has not already given his assent?"

"The Princess Agatha is certain of it. She told me so, and that was enough for me."

"But suppose it isn't enough for me? Suppose I have no confidence in that woman's shrewdness and foresight? Don't you know that women have no talent whatever for that sort of thing? Have they any other talent in the way of divining or pretending than the talent they place at the service of love?"

"You have become very learned on this subject, and I have continued to be quite ignorant; however, my friend, if you desire to know further details, ask the princess herself for them, and you will probably be satisfied. I intended to put you in communication with her to-night."

"To-night? in direct communication? Shall I be able to talk with her alone?"

"Surely, if you consider it necessary to the success of our undertaking."

The Piccinino turned abruptly to Michel, and looked at him without saying a word.

The young artist was unable to sustain that gaze without distress. The adventurer's manner of speaking of Agatha had already irritated him exceedingly, and to keep himself in countenance he was forced to take a cigarette which the bandit suddenly offered him with an ironical and quasi-patronizing air.

The Piccinino had risen, and seemed to have fully made up his mind to go. He began to unbuckle his sash, shaking and stretching his legs like a hunting-dog preparing for the chase.

He passed into another room, and soon returned, dressed with more care and more simply. He had covered his bare legs with long gaiters of white wool like those worn by the Italian mountaineers. But all the buttons, from ankle to knee, were of fine gold. He had put on the twofold doublet, the outer one of green velvet embroidered with gold; the inner one shorter, and less full, and of fashionable cut, was of lilac watered silk, embroidered with silver. A white leather belt encircled his supple waist; but, instead of the copper buckle, he wore a superb clasp of antique coraline, richly mounted. No weapons were visible, but there could be no question that he was provided with most adequate means of defence. Finally, he had exchanged his showy cloak for the classic cloak of black woollen cloth, lined with white, and covered his head with the pointed hood that gives the aspect of monks or ghosts to all the mysterious figures that one meets on mountain paths.

"Come," he said, looking himself over in a large mirror that hung against the wall; "I can appear before a woman now without frightening her. What do you think about it, Michelangelo Lavoratori?"

And, heedless of the impression that that conceited tone might produce on the young artist, he set about closing his house with the utmost care. After which, he gayly passed his arm through Michel's, and started off so swiftly that the others had difficulty in keeping pace with him.

When they had passed Nicolosi, Fra Angelo, stopping at a place where two paths converged, took leave of his young friends, to return to his monastery, advising them not to lose time escorting him thither.

"The leave granted me expires in half an hour," he said. "It may be that I shall have many other favors to ask within a short time, and I must not abuse this one. Yonder is the direct road to the Villa Palmarosa without passing Bel Passo. You do not need me to be introduced to the princess's presence. She has been notified and she expects you. Here is a key to the park, Michel, and one to the little garden outside the Casino. You know the staircase cut in the rock. You must ring twice, thrice and once at the small gilt gate at the top. Until then avoid being seen, and make sure that nobody is following you. When the maid comes to open the gate leading into the private garden, your countersign will be *Blessed Madonna of Bel Passo.* Do not lose these keys, Michel. Within a few days all the locks have been changed secretly, and the new ones are so complicated, that unless he applies to the locksmith who furnished them, and who is incorruptible, it will be impossible henceforth for Ninfo to get into the villa by means of false keys. One word more, my children. If any unforeseen occurrence should make my presence urgently necessary during the night, the Piccinino knows my cell and how to get into the convent."

"I should say as much!" said the bandit, when they

had left the Capuchin; "I have indulged in enough escapades at night and returned just before dawn often enough, to know how to climb the walls of the convent of Mal Passo. Well, my friend, we no longer have to be careful of good Brother Angelo's legs; we will run a bit on this slope, and you will be kind enough not to lag behind, for I am not inclined to follow beaten paths. It is not my custom, and the way the crow flies is much safer and more expeditious."

As he spoke he darted in among the rocks which descended abruptly to the bed of the stream, as if he proposed to jump over. It was a very bright night, as almost all nights are in that beautiful climate. But the moon, which was just rising and casting huge shadows across the ravines, made everything uncertain and deceptive to the eye. If Michel had not kept close to his guide, he would have been completely at a loss what course to take among masses of lava and steep cliffs which it seemed impossible to climb. Although the Piccinino was perfectly familiar with the practicable spots, there were some so dangerous and difficult that Michel would have refused to take the risk, except for the fear of being considered cowardly and awkward. But the rivalry of self-love is a spur which increases a man's faculties tenfold, and, at the risk of killing himself twenty times over, the young artist followed the bandit without stumbling and without uttering a word which betrayed his discomfort and his distrust.

We say distrust, because he soon felt sure that all this trouble and contempt of danger did not shorten their road. It might be a malicious device on the part of the adventurer to test his strength, his agility, and his courage, or an attempt to elude him. He was almost convinced of it, when, after half an hour of this wild chase,

and after thrice crossing the same winding stream, they found themselves in the bottom of a ravine which Michel thought that he recognized as one that he and the Capuchin had skirted on the higher land on their way to Nicolosi. He did not choose to make that suggestion; but he involuntarily paused a moment to look at the stone cross at the foot of which the *Destatore* had blown out his brains, and which stood out against the sky on the edge of the ravine. Then, looking about, he recognized the block of black lava which Fra Angelo had pointed out to him from a distance, and which served as a monument to the bandit chief. It was only a few steps away, and the Piccinino had walked thither and was standing beside the rock, with folded arms, in the attitude of a man stopping to take breath.

What could have been the Piccinino's idea in making that dangerous and useless détour in order to pass his father's grave? Could he be ignorant of the fact that he was buried there? or was he less reluctant to walk over his remains than to pass the cross which had witnessed his suicide? Michel dared not question him upon so painful and delicate a subject; he too, stopped, said nothing, and wondered why he had felt such a painful thrill when Fra Angelo had told him of the *Destatore's* tragic end. He knew himself well enough to be sure that he was neither cowardly nor superstitious, and at that moment he felt perfectly calm and superior to all vain terrors. He had no other sensation than a sort of disgust and indignation at the appearance of the young bandit, who was leaning against the fatal rock and tranquilly striking his flint to light a fresh cigarette.

"Do you know what this stone is?" demanded the extraordinary young man, abruptly; "and do you know

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vivacity, perhaps a little forced. "You think that I have a heart of stone, because I do not shed torrents of tears to my father's memory over this rock, which I am forced to pass every day, and on which I have sat a hundred times?"

"I know that you lost him when you were so young that you could not regret his companionship. I know that you must be accustomed, almost indifferent, to the gloomy memories connected with this spot. I say everything to myself to excuse your lack of feeling, but it does not justify in my eyes the species of bravado with which you place before me, designedly, I believe, the strange spectacle. I never knew your father, and had no tie of kinship with him, and yet the fact that my uncle loved him dearly and that a portion of his life was made illustrious by patriotic and valorous deeds is enough to inspire me with profound respect beside his grave, and to make me feel distressed and offended by your attitude at this moment."

"Master Michel," said the Piccinino, abruptly throwing away his cigarette and turning upon him with a threatening gesture, "it seems to me that you are a very strange young man to dare to rebuke me in this way, considering our position with respect to each other. You forget, I fancy, that I know your secrets, that I am at liberty to be your friend or your enemy; in short, that, at this moment, in this solitude, in this infernal spot where I may not be so entirely cold-blooded as you think, your life is in my hands!"

"The only thing that I have any reason to fear," rejoined Michel, calmly, "is that I may play the pedagogue inopportunely. That part is not suited to my years or my tastes. I will remind you, therefore, that if you had not incited my comments by a sort of persistence in questioning me, I should have spared you the infliction. As

for your threats, I will not say that I consider myself able to defend myself as powerfully and calmly as you would be likely to attack me. I know that, at a whistle from you, an armed man would start up from behind every rock in the neighborhood. I trusted to your word, and I did not arm myself to walk with a man who offered me his hand, saying: 'Let us be friends.' But if my uncle is mistaken with respect to your loyalty, and if you have led me into a trap, or—as I should prefer to believe for your own sake—if the effect of this spot is to disturb your mind and make you irresponsible, I will none the less tell you what I think, and I will not stoop to flatter the shortcomings upon which you seem to plume yourself for my benefit."

As he concluded, Michel opened his cloak to show the bandit that he had not even a knife upon his person, then sat down, facing him, and looking him in the eye with the utmost coolness. It was the first time he had ever been in such a position, for which he had certainly had no time to prepare himself, and from which he was not at all sure of extricating himself unharmed; for as the moon, emerging from behind the *Destatore's Cross*, fell full upon the young bandit's face, Michel was no longer in doubt as to the ferocity and treachery of his expression. Nevertheless Pier-Angelo's son, the nephew of the intrepid Capuchin of Bel Passo, felt that his heart was untouched by fear, and that the first serious danger which threatened his young life found him proud and undaunted.

The Piccinino, seeing how near he was, and that his own face was so illuminated by the moon, tried for a moment the terrifying effect of his tiger-like eyes; but having failed to make Michel lower his, and detecting no sign of poltroonery in his face or attitude, he suddenly sat down beside him and took his hand.

"Upon my word," he said, "although I do my utmost to despise you and hate you, I cannot succeed; I fancy that you have sufficient penetration to guess that I would rather kill you than save you, as I have undertaken to do. You are an embarrassment to me in respect to certain illusions which you can readily imagine: you balk me in certain hopes which I cherished, and which I am by no means inclined to renounce. But I am not bound by my word simply, but by a certain sympathetic feeling for you which I cannot shake off. I should lie if I said that I love you, and that it is a pleasant occupation to me to defend your life. But I esteem you, and that is a good deal. I assure you, you did well to answer me as you did; for now I can confess to you that this place sometimes brings on fits of madness; and I have formed terrible resolutions here on many a momentous occasion. You were not safe with me a moment ago; and I should not care to hear you utter a certain name again. Let us not stay here any longer, and do you take this stiletto, which I offered you once before. A Sicilian ought always to be ready to use it, and to my mind it is utterly insane to go about unarmed in the position you are in."

"Let us go," said Michel, mechanically taking the proffered dagger. "My uncle says that time is important, and that they are waiting for us."

"Waiting for *us?*" cried the bandit, leaping to his feet. "Waiting for you, you mean! Damnation! I wish that yonder cross and this stone might both sink into the ground! Young man, you may believe that I am an atheist, and that my heart is hard; but if you think it is of ice——Here, put your hand to it, and learn that desire and will have their seat there as well as in the brain!"

He seized Michel's hand roughly, and held it to his breast. It was heaving with palpitations of such vio-

lence that one would have said that it was on the point of bursting.

But when they had quitted the ravine, and had left the *Destatore's Cross* behind them, the Piccinino began to hum, in a voice as sweet and pure as the breath of the night, a ballad in the Sicilian dialect, of which the refrain was:

"Wine makes madness, love makes folly; my nectar is the blood of cowards, my mistress is my rifle."

After this outburst of bravado, addressed to himself as well as to the ears of any Neapolitan police who might happen to be within hearing, the Piccinino began to talk with Michel in a remarkably self-possessed and tranquil strain. He discussed fine arts, literature, external politics, and the news of the day, with as much freedom, courtesy, and refinement as if they were in a salon or on a public promenade, and as if neither of them had any momentous affair on hand, any exciting subject to engross his thoughts.

Michel soon realized that the Capuchin had in no wise exaggerated his pupil's varied knowledge and great talents. In the matter of the dead languages and classical subjects, Michel was quite unable to hold his own, for he had had neither the means nor the leisure to go to college before embracing an artistic career. The Piccinino, seeing that he was familiar only with translations of the texts which he quoted with an unfailing accuracy of memory, fell back upon history, modern literature, Italian poetry, novels, and the stage. Although Michel had read very extensively for one of his years, and although he had, as he himself put it, polished and sharpened his mind, hastily, by assimilating everything that came within his reach, he found that the peasant of Nicolosi, in the intervals between his hazardous expeditions, in the solitude of

his shady garden, had made even better use of his time than he. It was wonderful to see a man who could not walk in boots, or breathe in a cravat, who had never been down to Catania ten times in his life, who lived in retirement on his mountain, and had never seen the world or come in contact with cultivated minds, but who had acquired by reading, reasoning, or the divination of a keen intellect, full knowledge of the modern world in its most trivial details, as he had acquired in the cloister knowledge of the ancient world. No subject was unfamiliar to him; he had learned all by himself several living languages, and he ostentatiously talked with Michel in pure Tuscan, to show him that no one at Rome could speak or pronounce it more correctly and melodiously.

Michel took so much pleasure in listening and replying to him, that he forgot for a moment the distrust which so complicated a mind and a character so difficult to define naturally inspired in him. He made the rest of the journey almost unconsciously, for they were then following a smooth and safe road; and when they arrived at the park of Palmarosa, he started with surprise at the thought of finding himself so soon in Princess Agatha's presence.

Thereupon all that had happened to him during and after the ball passed through his memory like a series of strange dreams. A delicious emotion stole over him, and he no longer felt very indignant or very much horrified at the pretensions of his companion, as he reflected upon those which he himself cherished.

XXVI

AGATHA

Michel himself opened the little gate at which the path which they had followed came to an end, and, having crossed the park diagonally, stood at the foot of the staircase cut in the steep rock. The reader will not have forgotten that the Palmarosa palace was built against a precipitous slope, and formed three distinct buildings, which ascended the mountain backward, so to speak; that the topmost floor, called the Casino, being more isolated and cooler than the others, was occupied, according to the invariable custom of the country, by the most distinguished person in the family; that is to say, the mistress's apartments were on a level with the summit of the cliff, which was transformed into a garden, of small extent but most charming, at a great height, and on the opposite side from the main façade of the lower floors. There the princess lived in retirement, as in a luxurious hermitage, having no need to descend the staircase of her palace, or to be seen by her servants, when she chose to take a walk in the fresh air.

Michel had previously seen this sanctuary, but very hurriedly, as we know; and when he was sitting there with Magnani during the ball, he was so excited and talking so earnestly that he had not observed its arrangement and its surroundings.

When he came out upon that terrace with the Piccinino, after scaling the cliff, he obtained a better idea of its le-

cation, and observed that it was so disposed that it was in fact a little fortress. The staircase cut in the rock was much better adapted for a means of exit than of entrance; it was so crowded between two walls of lava, and so steep, that a woman's hand could easily have hurled back an insolent or dangerous visitor. Moreover, there was on the last stair, with nothing in the way of a landing between, a small gilt gate, unusually high and narrow, hung between two slender marble columns as smooth as the masts of a ship. On the outer side of both these columns was the sheer precipice, with nothing to grasp except heavy iron scroll-work in the style of the seventeenth century, fashioned to represent fantastic dragons, bristling with spikes in every direction; a decoration that served a double purpose, and was very difficult to surmount when one had no purchase and a precipice under his feet.

This fortification, if we may so describe it, was not without its utility in a region where brigands from the mountain carried on their operations in the valleys and the plain, even to the very gates of the cities. Michel observed the defences with the satisfaction of a jealous lover, but the Piccinino glanced at them with an air of contempt, and even went so far as to say, while they were ascending the staircase, that it was a sugar-plum citadel, which would be very effective at a dessert.

Michel rang the prescribed number of times, and the gate was immediately opened. A veiled woman stood there, impatiently awaiting them. In the darkness, she seized Michel's hand as he entered the garden, and the young artist, recognizing the Princess Agatha by that gentle pressure, trembled and lost his head, so that the Piccinino, who did not lose his, quietly removed the key which Michel had placed in the lock as he rang the bell.

The bandit placed it in his belt after closing the gate, and when Michel remembered his oversight, it was too late to repair it. They had all three entered the princess's boudoir, and that was not the moment to seek a quarrel with a man so entirely free from timidity as the *Destatore's* son.

Agatha had been warned and as fully advised as possible of the character and habits of the man with whom it was necessary for her to enter into relations; she was too much of a Sicilian to have any serious prejudices against the profession of bandit, and she was determined to make the greatest pecuniary sacrifices in order to make certain of the Piccinino's services. Nevertheless, she felt, at sight of him, a painful emotion which she had difficulty in concealing from him; and when he kissed her hand, gazing at her with his bold and mocking eyes, she was conscious of a painful feeling of discomfort, and her face changed perceptibly, although she was able to maintain an affable and courteous demeanor.

She knew that her first care must be to flatter the adventurer's secret vanity, by showing him much consideration and calling him *captain* to his heart's content. So she did not fail to bestow that title upon him as she invited him to sit at her right hand, while there was a more familiar kindliness in her manner of waving Michel to a chair partly behind her, near the back of her couch. Then, leaning toward him without looking at him, and resting her elbow close to his shoulder, as if to be prepared to call his attention by a movement apparently accidental, she attempted to enter upon the business before them.

But the Piccinino, noticing this manœuvre, and apparently considering that he was too far away from her, left his chair and unceremoniously seated himself beside her, on the sofa.

At that moment the Marquis della Serra, who had probably been waiting in an adjoining room for the conversation to begin, entered noiselessly, saluted the bandit with silent courtesy, and sat down near Michel, after shaking hands with him. Michel felt reassured by the presence of the man whom he could not help looking upon as his rival. He had already begun to wonder if he should not soon be tempted to throw the Piccinino out of the window; and as such an exploit might well have some serious result, he hoped that the bandit would be so far restrained by the marquis's grave face and dignified bearing, that he would not dare to overstep the limits of propriety.

The Piccinino knew that he ran no risk of being betrayed by the Marquis della Serra; indeed it pleased him to see that great nobleman offer him pledges of the alliance about to be made with him, to which the marquis must necessarily become a party.

"So the Marquis della Serra, too, is my friend and my accomplice?" he said to Agatha, in a reproachful tone.

"Signor Carmelo," replied the marquis, "you doubtless know that I was a near kinsman of the Prince of Castro-Reale, and that, consequently, I am your near kinsman. I was very young when the *Destatore's* true name was discovered by the police of Catania, and perhaps you are aware that I rendered the outlaw some important services at that time."

"I am familiar with my father's story," replied the young bandit, "and it is enough for me to know that the Marquis della Serra has transferred to me the good-will with which he honored him."

Gratified in his vanity, resolved not to play a ridiculous rôle, and equally resolved to make everybody's will bend beneath his own, the Piccinino desired to carry out

his purpose with spirit and good taste. So he speedily assumed a graceful and dignified attitude on the sofa, and imparted to his insolent and lustful glance an expression of benignant and almost respectful interest.

The princess broke the ice, and set forth the business in hand concisely, in almost the same words that Fra Angelo had used to induce the young wolf to leave his den. The Piccinino listened to her exposition, and his face did not betray the profound incredulity that lay behind his apparent attention.

But when the princess had finished, he coolly renewed his question as to the will, and declared that, in case it had already been abstracted, the kidnapping of Abbé Ninfo would seem to him a very tardy precaution, and his own intervention a source of useless trouble and *expense*.

Princess Agatha had not been horribly unhappy to no purpose. She had learned to detect the wiles of concealed passions, and her skill in that respect was not derived from her simple and straightforward mind, but acquired at her own expense in her relations with natures directly contrary to her own. So she very soon concluded that the *captain's* scruples were feigned, and that he had some secret motive which it was most essential to discover.

"Signor captain," she said, "if you have formed that opinion of my position, we must stop here, for I have asked to see you much more for the purpose of obtaining your advice than of telling you my ideas. However, be good enough to listen to some details which it was not in Fra Angelo's power to give you.

"My uncle the cardinal has made a will in which he constitutes me his sole heir; and it was only about ten days ago that, on his way from Catania to his villa of Ficarazzi, where he now is, he made a détour in order to

pay me a visit which I did not expect. I found my uncle in the same physical condition as when I saw him a little while before, at Catania; that is to say, helpless, deaf, and unable to speak distinctly enough to make himself understood without the assistance of Abbé Ninfo, who knows or guesses his desires with rare sagacity—unless he interprets or translates them to suit himself with unmeasured insolence! However, on that occasion, Abbé Ninfo seemed to me to follow my uncle's wishes in every respect; for the object of that visit was to show me the will, and to inform me that the cardinal's affairs were in perfect order."

"Who showed you the will, signora?" said the Piccinino; "for his eminence cannot move his arm or his hand at all, can he?"

"Patience, captain, I will not omit any detail. Doctor Recuperati, the cardinal's physician, had charge of the will, and I understood clearly enough, from my uncle's glances and his excitement, that he did not wish that document to leave his hands. Two or three times Abbé Ninfo came forward to take it, on the pretext of handing it to me, and my uncle glared at him with his terrible eyes and roared like a dying lion. The doctor replaced the will in his portfolio and said to me: 'I beg that your ladyship will not share his eminence's anxiety. However great the esteem and confidence inspired by Abbé Ninfo, this paper having been entrusted to my keeping, no other person than myself—not even the Pope or the king—shall touch a document of so much importance to you.' Doctor Recuperati is an honorable, incorruptible man, and as firm as a rock in emergencies."

"True, signora," said the bandit, "but he is stupid, and Abbé Ninfo is not."

"I am well aware that Abbé Ninfo is audacious enough

to invent some sort of a fable and lead the excellent doctor into a commonplace trap. That is why I have requested you, captain, to remove that hateful schemer from the scene for a time."

"I will do it, if it is not too late; for I should not care to risk my bones for nothing, and especially to endanger my reputation for talent, for which I care more than for my life. Once more, signora, do you think that it is not too late to resort to this expedient?"

"If it is too late, captain, it has been so not more than two hours," replied Agatha, observing him closely; "for, two hours ago, I paid a visit to my uncle, and the doctor, at a sign from him, showed me the paper once more, in Abbé Ninfo's presence."

"And it was the same?"

"Absolutely the same."

"There was no codicil in Ninfo's favor?"

"Not a word had been changed or added. The priest himself, who blandly pretends to be interested in my behalf, and whose every sidelong glance seems to say to me: 'You will have to pay me for my zeal,' insisted on my re-reading the paper carefully."

"And you did it?"

"I did it."

The Piccinino, in view of the princess's self-possession and tranquillity, began to form a more exalted idea of her merit; for hitherto he had seen in her nothing more than a seductive and charming woman.

"I am very well satisfied with these explanations," he said; "but, before taking any steps, I must know something more. Are you quite sure, signora, that within the last two hours Abbé Ninfo has not taken Doctor Recuperati by the throat and extorted that paper from him?"

now, captain? You alone can tell me,
consented to begin your secret investiga-
the doctor is a strong and brave man,
would not go so far as to allow himself
a weak, chicken-hearted creature like

uld prevent Ninfo, who is a scoundrel
and has relations with all the greatest
ntry, from hiring a *bravo*, who, for an
, may have lain in wait for the doctor
n—or who is all ready to do it at this

ich the Piccinino presented this sugges-
ree persons who were listening to him

" cried the princess, turning pale; "can
crime has been planned or executed?
, explain yourself, signor captain!"
signora, that crime has not been com-
ght have been, for it was determined

signor," said the princess, seizing both
s with a gesture of entreaty, "pray go
he life of an honorable man, and make
on of a vile knave, capable of any

the will falls into my hands during the
bandit, rising but not releasing the
which he had seized in a firm grasp as
ed his.
r captain?" she replied, energetically.
t is half of my fortune, when it is a
victims from the assassin's dagger? I
pens to the will. Seize the monster

who covets it. Ah! if I thought that I could satisfy his resentment by giving it up to him, he might long ago have looked upon himself as its undisturbed possessor!"

"But suppose that I become its possessor?" said the adventurer, fastening his lynx eyes on Agatha's; "that would not suit Ninfo, who knows very well that his eminence is in no condition to make or even to dictate another. But would you, signora, who have been imprudent enough to tell me what I did not know, who have informed me to what a ridiculous custodian a document of so great importance has been entrusted—would you be perfectly at ease?"

The princess had understood for a long time that the bandit would do nothing unless he could see a possibility of obtaining possession of the will to his own advantage. She had powerful reasons for being ready to sacrifice it to him, and to hand over an enormous sum to him without regret, when he should come to bargain with her for the restitution of her proof of inheritance; for everybody knew, and the bandit, who seemed to have studied the affair so carefully beforehand, probably was not ignorant of the fact, that there was an earlier will in the hands of a notary, which disinherited Agatha in favor of a distant relation. In a paroxysm of hatred and resentment against his niece, the cardinal had made that first will, and had made no secret of the fact. To be sure, when he became so ill, and received from her marks of sincere respect and affection, he had made different arrangements. But he had left the previous will in existence, in case it should be his pleasure to destroy the new one. When the wicked have a good impulse, they always leave a door open for the return of their evil genius.

Agatha had already made up her mind with respect to the Piccinino's ambitions; but by the way in which he

allowed them to appear, she understood that there was a large admixture of vanity in his avarice, and she had the fortunate inspiration to gratify both of the bandit's passions at the same time.

"Signor de Castro-Reale," she said, making an effort to pronounce a name that she abhorred, and to confer it upon him as a title rightfully belonging to the *Destatore's* natural child, "the will would be so safe in your hands, that I should be glad if I could place it there myself."

Agatha had conquered. The bandit's head was completely turned, and another passion, which was contending with greed in his heart, gained the upper hand in a twinkling. He put both of the signora's trembling hands to his lips and bestowed upon them a kiss so long and so passionate that Michel and the marquis himself shuddered. Another hope than that of wealth took possession of the Piccinino's brain. A violent passion had sprung to life within him on the night of the ball, when he saw her admired and coveted by so many men whom she did not even deign to notice, himself included; for she believed that she had never seen him before this interview, although he hoped that she was simply pretending not to recognize his face.

He had been incited especially by the apparent hopelessness of such a conquest. Although somewhat disdainful and apparently chaste with the women of his own station, the Piccinino had the appetites of a wild beast; but vanity filled so large a place in all his instincts that he rarely had an opportunity to satisfy them. This time the opportunity was still uncertain, but the prospect was most intoxicating to his enterprising, obstinate nature, fruitful in expedients, and enamored of difficult exploits, reputed to be impossible.

"Well, signora," he cried at last, in a chivalrous tone,

"your confidence in me proceeds from a noble heart, and I will not fail to justify it. Have no fear for Doctor Recuperati: he is in no danger whatsoever. It is quite true that Abbé Ninfo made a bargain this very day with a certain man, who promised to murder him; but, not only does the abbé propose to wait until the cardinal is on his death-bed, which is not the case as yet, but the dagger which is to strike your friend will not leave its sheath without my permission. There is no reason for such great haste, therefore, and I can safely return to my mountain for a few days. Ninfo is to come in person to advise us of the favorable moment to bury the knife in the good doctor's ample waistcoat, and, when that moment comes, instead of performing that agreeable duty, we will seize the abbé's person, begging him to enjoy the mountain air with us until it shall please your ladyship to restore his liberty."

The princess, who had been perfectly self-possessed thus far, became perturbed and replied in a quivering voice:

"I thought, captain, that you knew of another circumstance which makes us all very impatient to know that Abbé Ninfo is on the mountain. Doctor Recuperati is not the only one of my friends who is in danger, and I instructed Fra Angelo to tell you our other reasons for desiring to be rid of his presence forthwith."

The catlike Piccinino had not finished playing with the victim he coveted. He pretended not to understand or not to remember that Michel and his father were principally interested in the abbé's abduction.

"I think," he said, "that your highness exaggerates the dangers of Ninfo's presence about the cardinal. You must be aware that his eminence has the most profound contempt for that underling; that he can hardly endure his

presence, although he realizes the advantage of having so zealous and quick-witted an interpreter ; in short, that the cardinal, while he may need his services, will never allow him to meddle with his affairs. Your highness knows that there is a small legacy for the poor abbé in the will, and I fancy that you will not stoop to contest the payment of it."

"No, surely not!" replied the princess, surprised to find that the bandit was so familiar with the contents of the will ; "but it is not the paltry fear that the abbé may obtain more or less money from the cardinal that I have in my mind at this moment, I assure you. I have already told you, captain, and Fra Angelo also must have told you, that his brother and nephew are in great danger so long as Abbé Ninfo is in a position to injure them with my uncle, the cardinal, and the Neapolitan police."

"Ah!" said the crafty Piccinino, putting his hand to his forehead, "I had forgotten that, and yet it is a matter of importance to you, princess, I agree. Indeed I have several things to tell you in that connection which you do not know. But it is a very delicate subject," he said, feigning hesitation, "and it would be difficult for me to explain myself in the presence of the two gentlemen who honor me with their attention."

"You can say anything before the Marquis della Serra and Michelangelo Lavoratori," said the princess, somewhat alarmed.

"No, signora, I know my duty too well to do so, and my respect for you is too great to allow me to forget the proprieties to that point. If your highness is disposed to listen to me without witnesses, I will inform you of what has been planned and determined upon. If not," he added, pretending to be preparing to go, "I will go and wait at Nicolosi until you deign to advise me of the day and hour when it will be agreeable to you to listen to me."

"At once, signor, at once," rejoined the princess hastily. "I am more interested and more alarmed because the lives of my friends are endangered for my sake than by any question of money. Come," she added, rising, and resolutely placing her arm in the bandit's, "we will talk in my flower-garden, and these gentlemen will await us here. Stay, stay, my friends," she said to the marquis and Michel, who would have retired, although the idea of that tête-à-tête caused them both an indefinable dread; "I really need a breath of fresh air, and Signor de Castro-Reale is kind enough to offer me his arm."

Michel and the marquis, as soon as they were alone, looked at each other as if they had had the same thought, and, hastening each to a window, stood where they would not lose sight of the princess for an instant, although they could not overhear a conversation from which she herself seemed content to exclude them.

XXVII

DIPLOMACY

"How did it happen, dear princess," said the bandit, in a careless tone, as soon as he and Agatha were in the garden, arm-in-arm, "that you were imprudent enough to try to make me speak of Michel in presence of a cicisbeo so valuable to you as the Marquis della Serra? Your highness forgets one thing: that if I know the secrets of Villa Ficarazzi, I probably know those of Villa Palmarosa as well, since Abbé Ninfo maintains an equally assiduous surveillance over both houses."

"So Abbé Ninfo has seen you first, eh, captain?" rejoined the princess, trying to assume an equally unembarrassed tone; "and he took you into his confidence in order to obtain your services in his interest?"

Agatha knew very well what to think in that respect. Certainly, if she had not discovered that the abbé had already sought the Piccinino's assistance in abducting, or perhaps murdering Michel, she would not have thought it necessary to resort to him in order to procure the abduction of the abbé. But she was careful not to allow her real motive to be discovered. She desired that the bandit's self-love should be flattered by what he might consider an instinctive impulse on her part.

"From whatever source I derive my information," he replied, with a smile," I leave it to you to judge of its accuracy. The last time that the cardinal came to visit your highness, there was a young man at the gate of your park whose distinguished features and bearing were in striking contrast with his costume, which was covered with dust and worn by a long journey. What caprice induced the cardinal to examine that young man and to insist upon questioning him? that is something which Ninfo himself does not know and has commissioned me to find out, if possible. One thing is certain: that the mania, which has beset the cardinal for a long time, of inquiring the name and age of all the young men of the lower classes whose faces attract his attention, has survived the loss of activity and memory. It is as if he still retained a sort of vague distrust, a relic of his exalted police functions; and his imperative glance commands Abbé Ninfo to ask questions and report to him. It is true that when the abbé showed him the written result of his investigation, he seemed to take no interest in it; in like manner, whenever the abbé annoys him with his impertinent requests

or insinuating questions, his eminence, after reading the first words, closes his eyes angrily, to show that he doesn't wish to be fatigued any more. Perhaps your highness did not know these details, which Doctor Recuperati knows nothing of; for, during the few hours' sleep which the excellent doctor is permitted to enjoy, the watchfulness of the devoted servants with whom Your Highness has surrounded the cardinal does not avail to prevent Ninfo from entering his room, waking him without ceremony, and placing before him certain written sentences from which he hopes for favorable results. When the cardinal is awakened in this way, his pain and his anger make his mind momentarily more lucid than usual; he reads, seems to understand, and tries to utter words of which an occasional syllable is intelligible to his persecutor; but almost immediately he collapses again, and the feeble flame of his life is so much nearer extinction."

"So that villain has ceased to be a mere flatterer and spy, to become my unfortunate uncle's torturer and assassin?" cried the princess, indignantly. "You must see, signor captain, that he must be delivered from him at once, and that I need no other motive for desiring that he be taken out of our way."

"Pardon me, signora," rejoined the bandit, obstinately. "If I had not informed you of these things, you would still have personal motives of even greater weight, which you do not choose to tell me, but which I have learned from Ninfo. I never enter into an affair without making myself thoroughly acquainted with it; and it sometimes falls to my lot, as you see, to question both parties. Permit me to continue my disclosures, therefore, and I trust that they will lead to disclosures on your part.

"Abbé Ninfo did not examine very closely or ask many

questions of the individual at your highness's park gate. After a moment, seeing that the cardinal continued somewhat agitated by the encounter, as if the young man's face had aroused memories which he could not arrange and place,—for his eminence often wears himself out, it seems, in such painful mental toil,—the abbé retraced his steps and examined the young man more carefully. The young man evidently had some reason for being on his guard, for he deceived the abbé, who really took him for a poor devil, and even gave him alms. But two days later, the abbé, having, for the purpose of spying, disguised himself as a workman employed in the preparations for your ball, soon discovered that his poor devil was a brilliant artist, very much petted and favored by your highness, and by no means in a position to accept alms at the gate of a palace, since he is the son of a well-to-do artisan, Pier-Angelo Lavoratori.

"On the night succeeding this discovery, the abbé did not fail to place before Monsignor Hieronymo a sheet of paper containing this information in large letters. But by dint of trying to tighten the last remaining chords of the instrument, the abbé broke them. The cardinal did not understand. The names of Pier-Angelo and Michelangelo Lavoratori conveyed no meaning to him. He muttered a violent oath because Ninfo disturbed his slumber. And so," added the Piccinino, with malicious significance, "the fears which your highness entertains, or pretends to entertain, with respect to Pier-Angelo are entirely without foundation. Although the cardinal long ago prosecuted that excellent man as a conspirator, he has so completely forgotten him that even Ninfo has no hope of reviving the memory of an affair of which he himself knows nothing, and your protégé is in no danger from any denunciation by him, at present."

"I breathe again," said the princess, allowing the bandit to take her hand in his, and even responding to his pressure, with generous confidence. "Your words do me good, captain, and I bless you for having confidence enough in me to reveal the truth to me. That was my whole fear; but, since the cardinal remembers nothing and the abbé knows nothing, I trust to your sagacity for the rest. Look you, captain, it seems to me this is what we have to do. Do you find in your fertile genius some method of obtaining possession of the will, and see that the abbé is informed of it, so that there will be no further occasion for him to persecute the worthy doctor; then keep the abbé's attention diverted so that he will allow my unfortunate uncle to die in peace. That will conclude by diplomatic methods an affair in which I have feared that blood might be shed over paltry questions of money."

"Your excellency goes very fast!" rejoined the Piccinino. "The abbé cannot be put to sleep so easily with regard to another subject, which it is impossible for me, despite my respect, my awe and my embarrassment, to pass over in silence."

"Speak, speak!" said Agatha, hastily.

"Very well, since your highness authorizes me to do so, and does not choose to understand a hint, I will tell you that Abbé Ninfo, while in quest of political intrigues which he has not succeeded in discovering, has put his hand upon a love affair which he has turned to his advantage."

"I do not understand," said the princess, with an air of sincerity that startled the adventurer.

"Can Ninfo have been gulling me," he thought, "or is this woman strong enough to hold her own against me? We will see."

"Signora," he said, in a honeyed tone, holding Agatha's hand against his breast, "you will detest me, I suppose. However, I must serve you against your will by telling you what I know. The abbé discovered that Michelangelo was admitted every day at certain hours to the private apartment in your Casino; that he did not eat with your servants or with the other workmen, but with you, in secret; in a word, that, when he took his siesta, he rested from his artistic labors in the arms of the loveliest and most lovable of women."

"It is false!" cried the princess; "it is an abominable falsehood. I treated that young man with the distinction which I considered that I owed to his talent and his ideas. He ate with his father in a room next to mine, and took his siesta in my picture gallery. Abbé Ninfo did not watch very closely, or he might have told you that Michel, being utterly tired out, passed two or three nights under my roof."

"He told me that, too," replied the Piccinino, who always chose to seem to know beforehand what anyone told him.

"Very well, Signor de Castro-Reale," said Agatha, in a firm voice, looking him full in the face, "there is no doubt about the fact; but I can swear upon my mother's soul and your mother's that that young man never saw me until the day of the ball, when his father first introduced him to me, in presence of two hundred mechanics. I talked to him during the ball, on the main staircase, and the Marquis della Serra, who was escorting me, complimented him, as I did myself, upon his paintings. From that moment down to this very evening Michel had never seen me; ask himself! You are not a man whom one can deceive, captain; use your perspicacity, and I will trust it."

The Piccinino quivered with pleasure at this concise declaration, made with the assurance which truth alone can give, and he pressed Agatha's hand against his breast with such force that she detected his sentiments at last. She had a moment of terror, augmented by a ghastly reminiscence. But she realized, in a flash, the full extent of the dangers to which Michel had been exposed, and, postponing the matter of her own safety to a more favorable season, she determined to deal tenderly with Carmelo Tomabene's pride.

"What motive could Abbé Ninfo have had in telling us that extraordinary story?" he exclaimed.

Agatha fancied that she could understand that the abbé had detected the violent passion for herself by which she saw at last that the bandit was possessed, and that he had endeavored to incite him to vengeance by his tale of intrigue. "If that is so," she thought, "I will use the same weapons, vile Ninfo, since you have been kind enough to furnish me with them."

"Listen, captain," she said; "you who know men so well and read so readily the innermost folds of the conscience, must have discovered that, in addition to all his manifest vices, the abbé is an insatiable libertine? Do you suppose that he has confined himself to coveting my inheritance? did he not let you see that it was not for money alone that he would try to sell me a part of it if he should succeed in obtaining possession of it?"

"Yes!" cried the Piccinino, this time with the utmost sincerity; "I thought that I could detect revolting desires and hopes on the part of that monster of ugliness and lust. His affected incredulity concerning the possibility of resistance by a woman, in such cases, is simply an attempt to console himself when he thinks of his own physical and moral ugliness. Yes, yes, I suspected it in

spite of his hypocrisy. I will not say that he loves you; that would be a profanation of the word love; but he desires you, and he is jealous. Jealous, do I say! Ah! that word again is too respectable! Jealousy is the passion of young hearts, and his is decrepit. He suspects and detests everybody about you. In fact, he has devised an infernal method of conquering you: judging rightly that the desire to ransom your inheritance would not suffice, and supposing that you loved this young artist, he has determined to use him as a hostage and to compel you to purchase at his own price the life and liberty of Michelangelo."

"I ought to have expected that," replied the princess, affecting an air of contemptuous tranquillity, although her whole body was bathed in cold perspiration. "And so he selected you, captain, as his associate in an undertaking worthy of those men who devote themselves to the most hideous of all trades, the mere name of which is so degrading that no true woman could bear to speak it in any tongue! It seems to me that that mark of confidence on the part of the excellent Abbé Ninfo merits a somewhat severe punishment at your hands!"

Agatha had touched the right chord. The abbé's execrable projects, which had previously moved the young bandit to nothing more than satirical contempt, appeared to him now in the light of a personal insult and kindled the thirst for vengeance in him. So true is it that love, even in a wild, unbridled heart, arouses the sentiment of manly dignity.

"Severe punishment!" he said, in a deep voice, with clenched teeth; "he shall have it!—But," he added, "have no further anxiety about anything, signora; deign to place your fate in my hands unreservedly."

"My fate is already in your hands, captain," replied

Agatha; "my fortune, my reputation, and the lives of my friends: think you that I have an anxious air?"

And she looked him through and through with a profound gaze, wherein she was so happily inspired by the superior sagacity of the courageous woman, that the Piccinino felt its influence and found that respect and awe were mingled with his passion.—"Ah! you romantic woman," he thought, "you have not outgrown the belief that a bandit chief must be a stage hero or a chevalier of the Middle Ages! And here am I compelled to play that part for your pleasure! Very well, I will play it. Nothing is difficult to him who has read much and reasoned much.—Indeed, why should I not be a hero in good earnest?" he said to himself, as he walked silently beside that trembling woman whom he believed to be so trustful and confiding, pressing her arm to his side with his own trembling arm. "If I have not deigned to be one hitherto, it is simply because the opportunity has never offered, and my essays at grandeur would have been absurd. With such a woman as this, the game is well worth the candle, and I cannot believe that it is difficult to be sublime when the reward is destined to be so sweet. It is an undertaking founded upon a selfish motive more elevated, but no less substantial or less logical than others."

Before assuming definitively the attitude of the princess's true knight, he determined to do away with a lingering remnant of distrust, and he was almost ingenuous in seeking to cure himself of it.

"The only weakness of which I am conscious," he said, "is the dread of playing a ridiculous rôle. Ninfo wished me to play an infamous one, he shall be punished for it; but if your highness really loves that young man

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XXVIII

JEALOUSY

Neither the marquis nor Michel had heard a word of the conversation we have reported. But the first was tranquil in his mind, the other was not. The marquis, having assured himself that the princess was calm, had no fear that she incurred any immediate danger with the brigand; whereas Michel, not being familiar with her character, suffered keenly at the bare thought that the Piccinino might, in his speech, have gone beyond the bounds of respect. His suffering was intensified when he saw the Piccinino's face as he returned to the boudoir.

That face, ordinarily so indifferent and composed, was, as it were, illuminated by confidence and joy. The little man seemed to have grown a cubit taller, and his black eyes flashed flames which one would not have believed could be kindled in a head so cool and calculating.

No sooner had the princess, who was somewhat fatigued from having walked a long while in a small space, seated herself on the couch, to which he escorted her with the most dignified courtesy, than he fell, rather than sat down upon a chair, on the other side of the small boudoir, but with his face turned toward her as if he had stationed himself there to gaze at her in the glare of the chandelier. In truth, the Piccinino, after having enjoyed in the garden the sweetness of her voice, the flattering significance of her words, and the softness of her hand, desired, in order to put the finishing touch to the sensuous delight

which he had felt for the first time in his life, to gaze at her at his leisure, without the labor of speech or of thought. He fell into a silent meditation, more eloquent than Michel could have desired. He feasted his bold eyes with the sight of that exquisite and fascinating woman, whom it seemed to him that he already possessed, as with a treasure which he had stolen, and which he took pleasure in gloating over, as it lay gleaming before him.

The young painter's distress was intensified by the fact that, under the mysterious influence of that all-pervading passion, which but just born was already spreading with the rapidity of a conflagration, the bandit acquired a strange power of fascination. His exquisite beauty shone forth like a star emerging from the vapors on the horizon. All that was unusual in the outlines of his features and disquieting in their veiled expression gave way to a subtle charm, an overpowering effusiveness, albeit silent, and, as it were, overwhelmed by its own ardor. He was lying back in his chair, but no longer affected indifference or absent-mindedness. His hanging arms, his bent back, his eyes, glistening and fascinated, and fixed intently on the princess, indicated that he was shattered, as it were, by the explosion of a force unknown to himself, and drowned in the anticipated joys of his triumph. Michel was afraid of him for the first time. He would still have defied him fearlessly in the ill-omened solitude of the *Destatore's Cross;* but in that room, radiant with a strange ecstasy, he seemed too overpowering for any woman to escape the fascination of that basilisk glance.

However, Agatha did not seem to notice it, and whenever he turned his eyes from the bandit to her, he found her apparently calm and undisturbed, having no thought either of attacking or of defending herself.

"My friends," she said, after pausing a moment to take breath, "we can say good-night and separate with our minds at rest. I place my full confidence in this new friend whom Providence, acting through the wisdom of Fra Angelo, has sent to us. You will share my confidence when I tell you that he knew beforehand, and knew far better than ourselves, what we had to fear and to hope."

"It is a decidedly interesting affair, it is true," said the Piccinino, making an effort to emerge from his dreaming; "and it is time that this young man should know why I roared with laughter when he came to see me. You will laugh too, I hope, Master Michelangelo, when you learn that you came and entrusted your fate to a man who had been strenuously urged, an hour earlier, to do you a bad turn; and if I were not calm and prudent in such affairs, if I believed blindly the words of those who came to consult me, while you were urging me in her highness's behalf to kidnap Abbé Ninfo, I should have seized you and thrown you into my cellar, securely bound and gagged, at the request of Abbé Ninfo. I see by your manner that you would have resisted vigorously. Oh! I know that you are brave, and I fancy that you are stronger than I. You have an uncle who has kept his muscles in play so persistently for twenty years past, breaking stone, that he cannot have lost any of the strength which caused him to be called *Iron Arm* when he plied another trade on the mountain; but, when one is engaged in a matter of great political moment, one takes precautions, and I had but to touch a little bell to have my house surrounded by determined men, who would not have afforded you even the pleasure of resistance."

Having spoken thus, his eyes fixed upon Michel with a playful expression, the Piccinino turned again to the prin-

oncealed her pallor behind her fan, and
d met her eyes, they were armed with a
on which dispelled the last traces of his
The secret pleasure which it always af-
ghten those who ventured into his pres-
d before that womanly glance, which
o him: "You shall not do it, I forbid

once assumed an expression of hearty
ld to Michel:
young friend, that I had my reasons for
explanation of the affair, and for not
of a hurry. Now that I am convinced
ruth are on one side, infamy and false-
, my choice is made, and you can sleep
ut. I propose to go with you to Cata-
addressing Michel in an undertone,
rrange the worthy abbé's departure for
I absolutely require two hours' rest.
me a corner in your house where I can
wo hours without danger of being seen?
are hardly known in the city, and I do
become known there until it is neces-
an I enter your house without fear of
specially women's eyes?"
g sister who is moderately inquisitive,"
iling; "but she will be in bed at this
rust me, as I trusted you; I will give
and sit up in the room if you wish."
d the bandit, who, while talking with
g to overhear the words, unimportant
ich the princess was exchanging with
der not to embarrass the conversation
young men. Michel observed that,

notwithstanding the Piccinino's assertion that he could not do two things at once, he did not lose a gesture, a word, or a movement of Agatha's, while he was talking with him.

When he was assured of the two hours' absolute rest which was, he said, indispensable to put him in a condition to act intelligently, the Piccinino rose and prepared to retire. But the coquettish moderation with which he arranged his cloak about his flexible figure, the languid grace of his preoccupied air during that momentous operation, and the imperceptible quivering of his silky black moustache, showed plainly enough that he went away with regret, and after the manner of a man who is striving to dispel the mists of drunkenness in order to return to work.

"You do not wish to be seen?" said Agatha; "then step into the marquis's carriage with Michel. He will drive you to the outskirts of the city, and you can slip through the narrow streets."

"Many thanks, signora!" replied the bandit. "I have no desire to take your servants and the signor marquis's into my confidence. To-morrow morning Abbé Ninfo, whose discernment exceeds their discretion, would learn that a mountaineer came out of your apartments whom nobody had seen go in; and the excellent abbé, thinking that that performance savored somewhat of the *bravo*, would insult me by withdrawing the confidence with which he honors me. I must be his fidus Achates and his very good friend for twelve hours more. I will go out with Michel as I came."

"And when shall I see you again?" said Agatha, courageously offering him her hand, despite the lustful flame in his unshrinking eyes.

"You will not see me again," he replied, putting one

knee to the floor and kissing her hand with a sort of frenzy in marked contrast to the humility of his attitude, "until your orders are carried out. I cannot fix the day and hour, but I will answer for the safety of all your friends—even the stout doctor—with my life! I know the way to your Casino. When I ring *one, three* and *seven* at the gate of your flower-garden, will your ladyship deign to admit me to your presence?"

"You can rely upon it, captain," she replied, giving no sign of the alarm caused her by that request.

The Marquis della Serra did not fail to take his leave at the same time that the two young men went from the boudoir into the garden. His respect for the princess was so punctilious that he would not for the world have assumed the attitude of a favored lover. But he descended the staircase of the palace slowly, still disturbed in mind, and ready to go up again at the slightest noise.

On leaving the garden, the Piccinino locked the gate himself and handed the key to Michel, reproaching him for his carelessness.

"Except for me," he said, "this all-important key—this key that cannot be replaced—would have been left in the lock."

A moment's self-possession, before entering the boudoir, had sufficed for the bandit to take the impression of the key on a lump of wax which he always carried with him for emergencies.

They had no sooner started down the staircase cut in the rock than Agatha's maid, who was entirely devoted to her, came to her and said:

"The young man whom your highness sent for is waiting in the picture gallery."

Agatha put her finger to her lips to warn the maid to speak lower on such occasions, and went down to the

floor below, where Magnani had been waiting more than half an hour.

Poor Magnani had been more dead than alive since he received the princess's mysterious message. Being very different from the Piccinino, he was so far from entertaining the slightest hope that he imagined the worst that could possibly happen. "I must have made a terrible mistake," he said to himself, "in confiding to Michel the secret of my folly. He probably talked about it with his sister, and Mila has seen the princess, who treats her like a spoiled child. The chatter of that girl, who cannot understand the gravity of such a disclosure, terrified and disgusted the princess. But why not banish me without any explanation? What can she say to me that will not be horribly painful and uselessly cruel?"

That hour of suspense seemed to him a century. He was cold; he felt as if he should die, when the secret door of the gallery opened noiselessly, and he saw Agatha approaching him, pale with the excitement through which she had just passed, and diaphanous in her white lace cape. The enormous gallery was lighted only by a single glass lamp. It seemed to him that the princess did not walk, but that she glided toward him, after the manner of a ghost.

She approached without hesitation, and offered him her hand as if he were an intimate friend. And, as he hesitated to give her his, thinking that he was dreaming, fearing that he might misunderstand the meaning of that gesture, she said to him in a soft but firm voice:

"Give me your hand, my child, and tell me if you still feel for me the friendship which you once expressed when you thought that you owed me some gratitude for your mother's cure. Do you remember? I have never forgotten that generous outburst of your heart!"

Magnani could not reply. He dared not put Agatha's hand to his lips. He pressed it gently in his as he bent over it. She felt that he was trembling.

"You are very timid," she said; "I hope that if you are afraid of me there is no touch of distrust in your fear. I must speak to you quickly; do you answer in the same way. Are you disposed to do me a very great favor, at the risk of your life? I ask it in your mother's name!"

Magnani fell on his knees. Only with his eyes, which were streaming with tears, could he testify his enthusiasm and his devotion. Agatha understood him.

"You must return to Catania," she said; "run until you overtake two men who have just left here and who will not have five minutes' start of you. One is Michelangelo Lavoratori; you can readily recognize him in the moonlight. The other is a mountaineer wrapped in his cloak. Follow them without seeming to watch them, but do not lose sight of them. At the least suspicious gesture on that man's part, you will hurl yourself upon him and throw him down. You are strong," she added, touching the young artisan's robust arm; "but he is active and cunning. Be on your guard! See, here is a dagger; use it only in self-defence. That man is either my enemy or my preserver, I do not know which. Spare his life, if possible. Fly with Michel, if you can thereby avoid a bloody battle. You live in the same house with Michel, do you not?"

"Almost, signora."

"Be where you can assist him at the first alarm. Do not go to bed; pass the night as near his room as you can. The man I speak of will go away before daylight; do not leave your house and do not let Michel go away unless you go together, always together, do you understand? And be ready until I give different orders. To-

morrow I will explain everything to you. I will see you. Rely upon me, from this day forth, as a second mother. Come, my child, follow me; I will put you on the track of Michel and his companion."

She took him by the arm and hastily led him up to the Casino, which they passed through without a word. She opened the garden gate, and pointing to the staircase in the rock, "Go," she said, "celerity, caution, and your noble heart, the heart of a man of the people, for your friend's buckler!"

Magnani descended the stairs as swiftly and noiselessly as an arrow. He wasted no time in reflection, nor did he exhaust the force of his determination by worrying. He did not even ask himself the question whether Michel was his fortunate rival, and whether he should not be tempted to run him through the heart. Impelled by the magic force which Agatha's hand and breath had given him, he was all ready to lay down his life for that favored child of fortune, and he felt no more regret than hesitation at the thought of sacrificing himself thus. Nay, more, he was happy and proud to obey the woman he loved, and her words rang in his heart like a voice from Heaven.

He was soon in the fields and discovered two men walking along a path. He recognized Michel; he recognized the mountaineer's cloak. He took pains not to show himself; but he measured with a glance the distance and the obstacles that he would have to pass over in case of an alarm. The mountaineer stopped for a moment, talking earnestly. Magnani, with a determined effort of strength and activity, which under other circumstances would have been beyond the power of man, reached a point sufficiently near to overhear him, and found that he was talking of love and poetry.

allowed them to gain on him again, and, gliding gh a narrow path among the blocks of lava that lay eat heaps at the entrance to the city, he arrived be- hem in the yard of the adjoining houses occupied by mily and Michel's. He watched his young friend is suspicious guest enter the house. Then Magnani the circuit of the houses, looking for a place where uld pass the night, unseen, but within hearing of ightest noise, the slightest commotion inside.

XXIX

APPARITIONS

-Angelo had been notified by the princess and by a ge from the monk of Mal Passo, that he must not rmed by his son's absence, and that, in case of , the young man would pass the night either at nvent with his uncle, or in the Marquis della Serra's . The princess would have preferred the latter ; but the necessity of showing absolute confidence brigand, concerning whose sensitiveness Fra An- ad fully informed her, had triumphed over her . With great foresight she had sent for Magnani, have seen that she was justified in her reliance hat excellent young man.

-Angelo, naturally optimistic, and reassured by the e he had received, had gone to bed and was mak- for the fatigue of the ball like a man who knows use time to advantage. Mila had also gone to her

room; but she was not asleep. She had passed the afternoon with the princess, and, upon being questioned by her concerning her friends, had spoken of Antonio Magnani among others with a warmth which would have betrayed the secret of her heart, even if Agatha had not been watchful and penetrating. It was the favorable account the girl had given of her young neighbor which had finally led the princess to call upon him for aid in the embarrassment of her situation. She had said to herself that Magnani might well become Mila's husband some day, and that nothing could be more natural, therefore, than that he should have a share in shaping Michelangelo's destiny. She had entrusted Mila with the message to Magnani to come to her that night, and poor Magnani, on receiving the message, had nearly fainted. Should we not rather say *poor Mila?* But Mila had attributed the young man's confusion to his timidity alone. Agatha was the last person whom she would have suspected of being her rival, not that she was not in her eyes the loveliest of women, but because, in a pure heart, there is no room for jealousy of the persons whom one loves. On the contrary, the true-hearted child was happy in the mark of esteem and confidence with which her dear Agatha had honored Magnani. She was proud of it for his sake, and would have liked to be able to carry him such messages every day.

But the princess had thought that she ought not to conceal from Mila the fact that Michel was necessarily involved in an adventure in which he might incur some danger, and that Magnani would assist him to defend himself.

So Mila was anxious; she had said nothing to her father of her fears; but she had been out more than ten times on the road to the villa, listening to noises in the

distance, watching all the passers-by, and returning to the house each time more distressed and alarmed than before. At last, when eleven o'clock struck, she dared not go out again, but remained in her room, sometimes at the window, where she tired her eyes staring to no purpose, sometimes beside her bed, where she fell on her knees, depressed beyond measure, with her face buried in the pillow. At times her pulses throbbed so violently that she mistook the throbbing for a noise by her side. Then she would start and raise her head, and, hearing nothing, try to pray.

At last, about midnight, she thought that she heard distinctly a faint sound of irregular footsteps in the yard. She looked and fancied that she saw a shadow glide along the wall and disappear in the darkness. It was Magnani; but she could not distinguish any well-defined form, and was not sure that she had not been deceived by her own imagination.

A few moments later two men stole noiselessly up the outside staircase of the house. Mila had begun to pray again, and did not hear them until they were under her window. She ran to the window, and seeing only the tops of their heads, as she was directly above them, she had no doubt that they were her brother and Magnani returning together. She hastily rearranged her lovely hair, which had fallen over her shoulders, and hurried to meet them. But as she passed into Michel's chamber, the outer door of that chamber opened, and she found herself face to face with Michel and a man who was fully a head shorter than Antonio Magnani.

The Piccinino, whose features were hidden by the hood of his cloak, hastily drew back and closed the door, saying: "You probably did not expect your mistress to-night, Michel. Under any other circumstances it would give me

great pleasure to see her, for she seemed to be as beautiful as the Madonna; but at this moment you will oblige me greatly if you can send her away without letting her see me."

"Have no fear," replied the young artist. "This woman is my sister, and I will send her back to her own room. Stay here a moment, behind the door."

"Mila," he said, entering the room again and holding the door between his companion and himself, "you seem to have taken a mania for sitting up late like a night-bird. Go back to your own room, my dear love, I am not alone. One of father's apprentices has asked me to take him in, and I am going to share my bed with him. You must see that you shouldn't stay here another moment, unless you want to be seen with your hair and dress in disorder."

"I will go," said Mila; "but tell me first, Michel, whether Magnani came home with you?"

"What does it matter to you?" rejoined Michel, testily.

Mila heaved a profound sigh, and returned to her room, where she threw herself on her bed, quite disheartened, but determined to pretend to be asleep, and to listen to everything that was said in the adjoining room. Perhaps something had happened to Magnani; her brother's abrupt manner seemed to her of evil augury.

As soon as the Piccinino found himself alone with Michel, he asked him to throw the bolts and to place a mattress from the bed against the thin warped door of the adjoining room, through which the light could be seen and their voices heard. When that was done, he asked him to make sure that his father was asleep, or, if he were still awake, to wish him good-night, so that the old man might not take it into his head to come upstairs. As he spoke, the bandit unceremoniously threw himself on Michel's bed, having first removed his rich doublet, and,

covering his head with his cloak, seemed determined not to lose an instant in going to sleep.

Michel went downstairs as he was requested; but he was no sooner on the staircase than the young outlaw sprang to his feet as swiftly and lightly as a bird, threw the mattress aside, drew the bolt, and approached Mila's bed, beside which her little lamp was still burning.

Mila heard him come in; but she supposed that Michel had come to make sure that she was in bed. It did not occur to her that another could have the audacity to enter her room thus, and, like a child who is afraid of being scolded, she closed her eyes and lay perfectly still.

The Piccinino had never seen a beautiful woman without being disturbed and restless until he had examined her carefully, in order that he might cease to think of her if her beauty was imperfect, or cast his net over her if her style of beauty succeeded in inflaming his disdainful heart, a strange compound of love and indolence, energy and torpor. Few men of twenty-five have lived so chaste and self-restrained a life as the bandit of Ætna; but few imaginations are so fertile as his was in dreams of pleasure and in boundless appetites. It seemed that he was always seeking to kindle his passions in order to test their intensity, but that he abstained from gratifying them most of the time, fearing lest his enjoyment might fall short of the idea he had conceived of it. Certain it is that on the few occasions on which he had given way, he had been profoundly depressed afterwards, and had reproached himself for having expended so much exertion for a pleasure so soon exhausted.

Perhaps he had other reasons for wishing to see Michel's sister's features without Michel's knowledge. However that may be, he gazed at her attentively for a moment, and, enraptured by her beauty, her youthful

grace, and her air of innocence, he asked himself whether he would not do better to love that fascinating child rather than a woman older than himself and doubtless more difficult to persuade.

At that moment Mila, weary of feigning sleep, and more eager for news of Magnani than afraid of her brother's reproaches, opened her eyes and saw the stranger leaning over her. She saw his eyes gleaming under his hood, and, terror-stricken, she was on the point of crying out, when he put his hand over her mouth.

"Child," he said in a low voice, "if you say a word, you are lost. Hush, and I will go away. Come, come, my lovely angel," he added, in a caressing tone, "don't be afraid of the friend of your family; before long perhaps you will thank him for having disturbed your sleep."

And, being unable to resist an insane impulse of coquetry, of a sort that often caused him suddenly to forget his resolutions and his cautious instincts, he threw back his hood and disclosed his beautiful features, made still more beautiful by a sweet and winning smile. The innocent Mila thought that she had had a vision. The diamonds that sparkled on the young man's breast so heightened the general effect that she did not know whether it was an angel or a prince in disguise who stood before her. Bewildered, hesitating, she smiled back at him, half fascinated, half terrified. Thereupon he lifted a heavy tress of her black hair, which had fallen over her shoulders, and put it to his lips. Fear gained the upper hand. Again Mila attempted to cry out. The stranger flashed such a terrible glance at her that her voice failed her. He put out the lamp, returned to Michel's room, bolted the door, and replaced the mattress; then, throwing himself on the bed and concealing his face, he seemed to be sleeping

soundly when Michel returned. All this had happened in less time than it has required to tell it.

But, for the first time in his life, perhaps, the Piccinino could not compel sleep to deaden the activity of his thoughts. His imagination was an unbroken steed, with whom he had fought so many battles that he believed that he had placed a curb in his mouth forever. But the curb was broken, and that powerful will, exhausted in trivial combats, no longer sufficed to control fierce instincts too long held in check. He was between two violent temptations, which appeared to him in the shape of two women almost equally desirable, and whom the detestable Ninfo had practically offered to share with him. Michel was the hostage whom he had in his hands, and for whose ransom he could demand and perhaps obtain everything.

To be sure, he no longer believed in Agatha's passion for the young artist; but he had seen her utter indifference as to the matter of money, when it was a question of saving her friends from perils that threatened them. Was she so disinterested as to think that she ought to sacrifice something more than her fortune to ransom her protégé? Probably not; so that the bandit must rely upon his individual powers of seduction, and he saw in Michel only a means of gaining access to her so that he might exert those powers.

As for the young sister, it seemed to him an easier matter to overcome so innocent a child, not only because of the more direct affection which she undoubtedly entertained for her brother, but also because of her inexperience and the purity of her imagination, which he had tested with a glance.

In respect to youthful charm and mere physical beauty, Mila far surpassed Agatha; but Agatha was a princess,

and the instinct of vanity was strong in the bastard of Castro-Reale. She was supposed never to have had a lover, she seemed prudent and strong. She had had twenty years or more to practise self-defence and to repel the assaults of the passions she had inspired; for she was at least thirty years old, and in the fiery climate of Sicily, where plants mature in less time than they require in France to put forth buds, a girl of ten is almost a woman.

It was, therefore, a most glorious conquest to dream about, and for that reason most intoxicating. But there was also the fear of failure, and Carmelo thought that in that case he should die of shame and rage. He had never known pain; it was a word almost devoid of meaning to him until that moment. He was beginning to discover that one can suffer for other causes than anger and ennui. As he lay awake, he watched Michel without his knowledge. He saw him sit down at his table and take his head in his hands, in an attitude of the most complete discouragement.

Michel was profoundly depressed. All his dreams had vanished like smoke. His situation seemed to him sufficiently elucidated by the conversation he had had with the bandit as they returned from the villa. To test him, the Piccinino had repeated Abbé Ninfo's calumnies, pretending to believe them and generously to take Michel's part. The young painter's noble and upright heart had rebelled against a suspicion which assailed the princess's dignity; his denials and his manner of describing his first interview with her in the ball-room had corresponded so closely with the way in which the princess herself had represented the facts to the bandit, that the latter, after a more searching and subtle examination than that of an inquisitor, had ended by becoming convinced that there

was nothing criminal in the princess's relations with the artist.

Thereupon, seeing that there was a background of unhappiness to Michel's modesty and loyalty, the Piccinino had concluded that, if the princess did not love him, he wished that she might, and that he had fallen in love with her at first sight. He remembered Michel's abrupt and ironical reply to himself during the ball, and he took a cruel delight in making him feel that he could not hope to be loved by such a woman. It even occurred to him to admit that he questioned him only to test the refinement of his nature, and he ended by repeating word for word what Agatha had said when she pointed to Michel at the window of the boudoir: "Look at that young man and tell me if there can possibly be any wrongful relations between two persons of our respective ages and conditions." Then he added, pressing Michel's hand as they entered the city: "My child, I am pleased with you; for any other man, at your age, would have seized the opportunity to pose as the hero of a mysterious adventure with that adorable woman. Now I see that you are already a serious-minded man, and I can say to you in confidence that she has made an ineffaceable impression on me, and that I shall be like a stone in the crater of the volcano until I have seen her again."

The tone in which the Piccinino proclaimed, so to speak, this confession, combined with the remembrance of his enraptured face and his triumphant attitude when he returned to the boudoir with Agatha, alarmed Michel beyond expression. He had not felt obliged in conscience to tell him what illusions he had cherished, what he had thought that he could read in certain glances, still less what had taken place—and he did not believe that it was altogether a dream—in the grotto of the naiad. Indeed,

he would have considered it his bounden duty to deny it with all his strength if his rival could have suspected it. But all his phantoms of pride and happiness took flight before Agatha's cold words, repeated in a dry, cutting tone by the Piccinino. But one point remained obscure in his situation. That was the peculiarly warm affection of the princess for his father and sister. But how could he attribute the honor of that affection to himself? It was based upon an ancient political connection or upon gratitude for some service rendered by Pier-Angelo. Pier-Angelo's son was subjected to the dangers of that connection at the same time that he shared its benefits. When that debt of the heart was paid, it was impossible that Michel could arouse any further interest in the generous patroness of his family. The mysteries that had fascinated him fell back into the domain of reality, and instead of the pleasant labor of combating charming illusions, he had the mortification of feeling that he had combated them unsuccessfully and the pain of being unable to revive them.

"Why should I be jealous of the insolent joy that shone in the eyes of that bandit?" he said to himself in dire distress. "Have I any business even to consider the question whether his strange manner caused the princess pleasurable or painful emotion? What have she and I in common? What am I to her? Pier-Angelo's son! And he, this bold-faced adventurer, is her mainstay and her savior. He will soon have a claim upon her gratitude—perhaps upon her esteem and affection; for it rests only with him to acquire them. He loves her, and if he is not mad he will find some way or other to make her love him. But how can I earn any title to her distinction? Of what consequence are the embryotic products of my art in comparison with the energetic

assistance which she demands? It seems to me that she looks upon me as a child, since, instead of calling me to her aid, and entrusting to me some mission of importance to her interests and her personal safety, she does not even consider me capable of defending my own life. She considers me so weak or so timid that in this hour of our common danger she has sought the intervention of a stranger—an ally more dangerous than useful, it may be. O my God! how far she is from looking upon me as a man! Why did she not simply say to me: 'Your father and I are threatened by an enemy. Drop your brushes, take a dagger; defend your father or avenge me!' Fra Angelo reproached me for my indifference; but, instead of correcting it, they actually treat me like a child whom they pity, and whose life they save without troubling themselves about his heart!"

While he abandoned himself to these melancholy reflections, Michelangelo felt as if his heart were breaking, and finding in front of him the sprig of cyclamen, which was still living in its Venetian glass, he let a scalding tear fall upon it.

XXX

THE FALSE MONK

Mila had been so astonished and alarmed by the appearance of the Piccinino that she could not possibly sleep. The fact that alarmed her most was that she no longer heard conversation in the adjoining room, and

that she could not make sure that her brother was there. She was unwilling to go to bed, and, after a few moments, as her reflections served only to increase her terror, she rose and opened another door of her chamber which opened on an outer gallery, or rather a dilapidated corridor sheltered by an awning, and ending in a staircase which served as a means of communication between her room and those of the other occupants of the house. Mila had never opened that door at night, but this time she went out on the gallery, having fully determined to seek refuge with her father and to sit in his chamber until daylight.

But she had barely taken three steps when a new cause of alarm brought her to a standstill. A man was leaning against the wall of the gallery as motionless as a robber on the watch.

She was about to fly, when a voice said in a whisper: "Is that you, Mila?" And as the man walked toward her she recognized Magnani.

"Don't be afraid," he said. "I am watching here by order of a person who is dear to you. Doubtless you know why, as you transmitted her message to me?"

"I know that my brother has been in danger this evening," replied the girl; "but it seems that you are not the only one whom our dear princess has stationed beside him to defend him. There is another young man in his room, whom I do not know."

"I know it, Mila; but that young man is the very one who is under suspicion; and I must stand guard as near as possible to the place where he is sleeping, until he has left the house."

"But you are a long way from him!" exclaimed Mila, in dismay, "and my brother might be murdered and you not hear it from here."

"But what am I to do?" replied Magnani. "I could not get any nearer to his room. He took pains to lock the door at the foot of the other staircase. So I am here; and I have my eyes and ears open, I assure you!"

"I will watch, too," said the girl, resolutely, "and you can sit up with me, Magnani. Come into my room. Even though people should speak ill of us, if we were seen, even if my father and brother should scold me severely, it makes no difference to me! I am only afraid of the man who is locked into Michel's room with him, or alone—for they put a mattress against my door, and I cannot find out whether Michel is really there. I am afraid for Michel; I am afraid for myself."

And she told how the bandit had entered her room when Michel was apparently not there to oppose his entrance.

Magnani, being unable to explain such an extraordinary occurrence, accepted Mila's suggestion without hesitation. He entered her room, leaving the door of the gallery ajar, in order that he might retire unseen if need were, but all ready to burst in Michel's door at the slightest alarming noise.

When he had listened coolly and cautiously, with his eye and ear glued to the partition, he said to Mila, beckoning her to the side of the room farthest from the door, and speaking very low:

"Set your mind at rest; they are not so well barricaded that I could not see Michel sitting at his table, apparently deep in meditation. I could not make out the other one, but I promise you that they cannot make a movement which I shall not hear, and that their bolt will not hold a second against my fist. I am armed; so don't be afraid any more, my dear Mila."

"No, no, I am not afraid," she said. "Since you have been here, I have recovered the use of my mind. Before you came, I was like a madwoman; I neither saw nor heard anything except through a veil. Have you had no accident, run no risk yourself to-night, Magnani?"

"None at all; but what are you looking for, Mila? You will make a noise fumbling in that drawer."

"No, no," she said. "I am getting a weapon too, for I feel as brave as a lion with you."

And she held up an ebony spindle, carved and mounted in silver, the stout, sharp point of which might at need serve the purpose of a stiletto.

"When our dear princess gave me this to-day," she said, "she had no suspicion that I might perhaps use it to defend my brother. But tell me, Magnani, how did the princess receive you, and how did she explain these mysteries which are happening all about us, and which I do not understand at all? We can safely talk here in this doorway; no one will hear us and it will help to make the time seem shorter and less dull."

She sat down on the step outside the door that opened on the gallery. Magnani sat beside her, ready to fly if any inquisitive individual should approach, ready to show himself if Michel's guest made any sign of hostility. They talked in very low tones, and their whispered words expired in the open air, nor did either of the two become so engrossed as to fail to pause and listen intently at the slightest sound.

When Magnani had told Mila what little he knew, she lost herself in vain conjectures as to the identity of that handsome young man, whose expression was at once sweet and fear-inspiring, who styled himself, when speaking with her, the friend of the family, and of whom

the princess had said to Magnani: "He is either our savior or our enemy."—And, when Magnani urged her not to try to fathom a secret which the princess and her family apparently deemed it necessary to conceal from her, she replied: "Do not think that I am consumed by silly childish curiosity! No, I have not that wretched failing. But I have been afraid all day long, and yet I am not timid, either. Something incomprehensible is going on about me, and I, too, believe that I am threatened by enemies whom I do not know. I do not dare to mention the subject to my father or to the princess; I am afraid that if they undertake to look out for me, too, they will neglect a part of the precautions demanded by their own safety. But I must think about defending myself; to-morrow, when you go to your work and my father and brother have gone out, I shall begin to tremble again for them, for you and for myself."

"I shall not go to work to-morrow, Mila," said Magnani. "The princess ordered me not to leave your brother, whether he remains at home or goes out. She did not mention you, which fact makes me almost certain that you are not included in the secret persecution at which she has taken fright. But, whatever happens, I shall not stir from here, without having made sure that no one can come and frighten you."

"Listen," she said, "I am going to tell you what happened to me to-day. You know that we often have in our yard some of those begging brothers, who annoy everybody, even the poor people, and whom you cannot get rid of without giving them something. Well, one of them came just after Michel and my father had left the house, and I never saw a monk so persistent, and so bold, and so inquisitive. Just fancy that, when he saw me working at my window, he took up his station just below

it, and there he stood, staring at me with a gaze that embarrassed me, although I tried not to meet his eyes. I tossed him some bread in order to get rid of him. He didn't condescend to pick it up. 'Young woman,' he said, 'that is not the way people give alms to a brother of my order. They take the trouble to go downstairs to him and to commend themselves to his prayers, instead of tossing him a crust as if he were a dog. You are not a pious maid, and your parents have brought you up badly. I am sure that you are not a native?'

"I made the mistake of answering him. He had put me in a bad humor with his sermon, and he was so ugly, so dirty, so insolent, that I could not help exhibiting my disgust. It seemed to me that I recognized him as a man I had seen in the morning at the Palmarosa palace. My brother was disturbed by his face at that time, and questioned my uncle Fra Angelo about him. He sent us away in haste, promising to find out who he was, for he did not recognize him as a Capuchin, and my father said that he resembled a certain Abbé Ninfo, who bears us a grudge, apparently. However, either it was not the same man, or else he had changed his disguise; for he wore the costume of a bare-footed Carmelite when he came here; and, instead of a thick, curly black beard, he had a red beard, as short and stiff as a wild boar's hair. He was even more horrible in that dress, and if it was not the same man, why, I can safely say that I have seen to-day the two most repulsive monks in Valdemona."

"And you were imprudent enough to talk with him?" said Magnani.

"Talk is not the word; I requested him to carry his preaching somewhere else, saying that I had no time to go down to him or to listen to his reprimands; that,

if he did not consider my alms worthy of his acceptance, he could give it to the first poor person he met, and that, if he was born proud, he had made a great mistake in becoming a mendicant."

"Doubtless he was irritated by your replies?"

"No, for if I had seen that he was mortified or angry, charity or prudence would have kept me from saying so much. But, instead of continuing to scold me, he began to smile; a ghastly sort of smile, to be sure, but not resentful.

"'You are an amusing child,' he said, 'and I forgive your lack of propriety because of your wit and your black eyes.'

"I ask you if it was not very wicked for a monk to pay any attention to the color of my eyes? I told him that he might stay a year under my window before I would look to see what color his were. He called me a flirt; a strange word, isn't it, in the mouth of a man who ought not even to know that there is such a word? I closed my window, but when I opened it a quarter of an hour later, being unable to endure the stifling heat in my room when the sun is high, he was still looking at me. I refused to talk to him any more. He told me that he would stay there until I gave him something better than bread; that he knew that I wasn't a poor girl; that I had a beautiful pin of chased gold in my hair, and that he would gladly accept that, unless I preferred to give him a lock of hair in its place. And he followed that up with such absurd and extravagant compliments that I believed and still believe he was laughing at me, and that it was his spiteful and unseemly way of venting his anger.

"As there were people in the house, particularly your father and one of your brothers, whom I could see working in their rooms within reach of my voice, I was not

alarmed by that wretched monk's strange remarks and impertinent glances; I answered only by making fun of him, and, to get rid of him, I promised to give him something on condition that he would go away at once. He declared that he had the right to accept or refuse my offering, and that, if I would let him choose, he would be very modest and would not ruin me.—'What do you want,' I said, 'a skein of silk to mend your ragged frock?'—'No,' he replied, 'it's too badly spun.'—'Do you want my scissors to cut your beard, which is growing all awry?'—'No, for I might perhaps use it to cut off the rosy tip of that impertinent little tongue.'—'A needle, then, to sew up your mouth, which doesn't know what it says?'—'No, for I am afraid that your needle has no sharper point than your epigrams.'

"We jested thus for some time; although he annoyed me, he made me laugh; for it seemed to me that his manner had become more fatherly than threatening, that he was really a monk, one of those persistent jokers such as we all know, who obtain by teasing what they cannot extort by prayer; and lastly, I discovered that he was very bright, and I did not put a stop to that childish badinage so soon as I should have done. I took from the wall a little mirror about the size of my hand, of no value, which he had noticed hanging by my window, as to which he asked me how many hours a day I passed consulting it. I lowered it to him by a silk thread, saying that he would certainly enjoy looking at himself in it much more than I had enjoyed having his face before my eyes so long.

"He seized it eagerly and kissed it, exclaiming in a tone which frightened me: 'Has it retained a reflection of your beauty, O dangerous maiden? Just a reflection! that is very little, but if I could fix it there, I would never take my lips from it.'

"'Fie!' I said, drawing back from the window, 'those words dishonor the frock you wear, and such jesting does not befit a monk.'

"I closed my window again and came to this door where we are now, and opened it so that I could breathe while I worked. But I had not been there five minutes when I saw the Capuchin before me. He had presumed to enter the house, I don't know how; for I had locked the outer door, and he must either have been prowling around in the adjoining house, or have known all the ins and outs of this one.—'Go away,' I said to him; 'no one has a right to enter a house in this way, and if you come near my door, I will call my father and brother, who are in the next room.'

"'I know perfectly well that they are not there,' he replied, with a hateful laugh, 'and as for the neighbors, it would do no good to call them, for I should be far away before they could get here. What makes you afraid of me, young woman? I only wanted to have a nearer view of your soft eyes and your red lips; Raphael's Madonna is a mere maid-servant compared with you. Come, don't be afraid of me'—and, as he spoke, he held the door open, which I tried to shut in his face.—'I would give my life for a kiss from you; but if you refuse me that, give me at least the rose that perfumes your breast; I shall die of joy dreaming that ——'

"I heard no more, for he had let the door go and tried to seize me in his arms. In spite of my terror, I had more presence of mind than he expected; for I stepped quickly to one side, slammed the door in his face, and as he was a little bewildered by the blow, I took advantage of it to run through Michel's room. I ran downstairs at the top of my speed, and didn't stop until I was in the street, for there was no neighbor near enough to depend upon. When

I was among the people in the street, I was no longer afraid of the monk, but I wouldn't have come back to my room for anything on earth. I walked to Villa Palmarosa, and didn't feel entirely at ease until the princess had taken me into her room. I passed the rest of the day there, and did not come home until father was ready. But I dared not say anything about what had happened, for the reason I have given you—and if I must be entirely frank, because I felt that I had been imprudent to joke with that wretched begging monk, and that I deserved some blame for it. A rebuke from my father would almost kill me; but from Princess Agatha—why, I would rather be damned at once and forever!'"

"Dear child, as you are so afraid of reproaches, I will keep your secret," said Magnani, "and I will not venture to make the slightest comment."

"On the contrary, I beg you to comment as severely as you please, Magnani. It will not humiliate me from you. I am not presumptuous enough to think that you like me, and I know that my childish faults will not cause you the slightest distress. It is because I know how dearly my father and Princess Agatha love me that I dread so to grieve them. But you can say whatever you please to me, for you will simply laugh at my foolishness."

"So you think me very indifferent, do you?" said Magnani, upon whom this story of the monk had had a singularly disquieting and disturbing effect.

Then, surprised at the question that had escaped him, he rose and went on tiptoe to listen at Michel's door. He thought that he could hear the regular breathing of a sleeping person. The Piccinino had in fact succeeded finally in allaying the tumult of his thoughts, and Michel, overcome by weariness, was dozing in his chair, with his head resting on his hands.

Magnani returned to Mila; but he dared not sit beside her again. "And I too," he thought, ashamed, and as it were, afraid of himself, "I am a monk consumed by my imagination and excited by enforced continence. This child is too lovely, too pure, too trustful, to live thus the untrammelled neglected life of girls of our station; no one can look at her without emotion, whether he be a monk doomed to celibacy or a man hopelessly in love with another woman. I would like to have my hands on that vile monk and break his neck; and yet I too quiver at the thought that this unsuspecting maiden is in this room, alone with me, in the silence of night, ready to seek shelter in my arms at the slightest alarm!"

XXXI

WITCHCRAFT

Magnani tried to divert his thoughts by talking of the princess with Mila. The innocent girl lured him into it, and he accepted that subject of conversation as a preservative. It will be seen that a strange revolution had taken place in two days in the young man's mental condition, since he had already reached the point of looking upon his love for Agatha as a duty, or as what the doctors call a depurative.

If he had been certain that the princess loved Michel, of which fact he was persuaded at times, with a feeling of utter stupefaction, he would have been almost entirely cured of his own mad passion. For he had given it so

exalted a place in his thoughts that, as he had lost hope, so he had almost reached the point where he desired nothing. His passion had become a sort of pious habit, so ideal that it no longer touched the earth, and that by returning it, Agatha might have destroyed it instantly. Assume that she loved any man on earth, even the man who cherished so exalted an adoration for her, and she became in his eyes simply a woman, whose influence he could combat. That was the result of five years' suffering without the slightest presumption, and without a moment's intermission. In a heart of such strength and purity, the utmost order had prevailed amid the effervescence of a passion which resembled a beginning of madness; and it was precisely that circumstance which might be Magnani's salvation. Efforts to deaden his pain would have served only to excite him more, and after indulging in vulgar pleasures, he would have returned to his chimera with more suffering and more weakness; whereas by abandoning himself without resistance, without desire for repose, and without terror, to a martyrdom which might be everlasting, he had allowed the flame to become concentrated in one spot, where it burned dully, not fanned from without, and deprived of any fresh sustenance.

Thus Magnani had reached that critical moment when a man must be cured or die, without any transition. He did not appreciate it, but it certainly was a fact, for his senses were awaking from a long period of numbness, and Agatha, far from contributing to the awakening, was the only woman to whom he would have blushed to attribute in his thoughts the perturbation that he felt.

Little by little, he leaned toward the girl in order not to lose a single one of her words, and he ended by sitting down beside her, and asking her why it had occurred to her to talk of him with Princess Agatha.

"Why, it is very simple," replied Mila; "she led me to do it by asking me which of the young mechanics of my acquaintance Michel had been most intimate with since he had arrived in the island; and as I hesitated between you and one or two of father's apprentices who assisted Michel, and whom he seemed to like, the princess herself said:

"'Perhaps you are not sure, Mila, but I would be willing to wager that it is a certain Magnani, who works for me, and of whom I think very highly. During the ball they sat in my garden together, and I was very near them—just behind the myrtle bush. I had gone there to rest, and was almost in hiding, in order to escape for an instant the torture of such a long performance. I overheard their conversation, which interested and touched me to the last degree. Your brother has a noble mind, Mila, but your neighbor Magnani has a great heart. They talked of art and work, of ambition and duty, of happiness and virtue. I admired the artist's ideas, but I fell in love with the artisan's sentiments. For your young brother's sake, I hope that Magnani will always be his best friend, the confidant of all his thoughts, and his adviser in the delicate emergencies of his life. You can advise him to that effect from me, if he happens to mention me to you; and if you tell either of them that I listened to the sincere outpouring of their thoughts, you will not fail to tell them also that I was a discreet listener, for there came a time when Magnani seemed on the point of disclosing to Michelangelo some personal matter which I did not choose to overhear. I retired hastily at the first word,'—Is all that accurate, Magnani? Do you remember the subject of your conversation with Michel in the garden of the Casino?"

"Yes, yes," sighed Magnani, "it is all true; indeed,

I noticed when the princess retired, although it would never have occurred to me that it was she who was listening to us."

"At all events, you ought to be proud of it, Magnani, and very glad of it, since what you said made her feel so much friendship and esteem for you. I even thought that I could see that she preferred your way of thinking to my brother's, and that she looked upon you as the wiser and better of the two, although she says that she has felt the same motherly interest in the welfare of both of you from that moment. Couldn't you repeat to me all the beautiful words which the princess so enjoyed hearing? I should be very glad to have the benefit of them, for I am a poor little girl, with whom Michel himself hardly deigns to talk seriously."

"My dear Mila," said Magnani, taking her hand, "honor to the man whom you consider worthy to form your heart and your mind! But, even if I could remember all that Michel and I said to each other in that garden, I should not presume to think that it would benefit you in any way. Aren't you better than either of us? And as for wit, which of us can have more than you?"

"Oh! now you are laughing at me! Princess Agatha has more than all three of us together, nor do I think that even my father has any more than she has. Ah! if you knew her as well as I do, Magnani! Such a head and heart! such charm! such kindness! I could pass my whole life listening to her; and, if my father and she would allow it, I would like to be her servant, although obedience is not my leading characteristic."

Magnani was silent for a few moments. He could not succeed in disentangling his thoughts in his excitement. Hitherto Agatha had seemed to him so far above all praise that he was indignant and hurt when anyone ven-

tured to say that she was lovely, charitable and sweet. He preferred to listen to those who said that she was ugly and mad, when they did not know her and had never seen her. They at all events said nothing about her in which there was the slightest sense, whereas the others praised her too feebly, and annoyed Magnani beyond words by their inability to comprehend her. But on Mila's lips Agatha lost nothing of the idea he had formed of her. Only Mila seemed to him pure enough to utter her name without profaning it, and because she shared his adoration, she was almost equal to his idol in his eyes.

"Dear Mila," he said at last, still holding her hand, which he had forgotten to give back to her, "to love and to understand as you do indicates a great mind. But what did you say about me to the princess? Ought I not to ask you?"

Mila blessed the darkness, which concealed her blushes, and she grew bolder as a timid woman gradually becomes intoxicated by the assured impunity of a masquerade.

"I am really afraid that it will be indiscreet in me to repeat it to you," she said, "and I should not dare to do it!"

"So you said unkind things about me, did you, naughty Mila?"

"No; for Princess Agatha had said so much good of you that it would have been impossible for me to think any evil of you. I cannot look at anything except through her eyes. But I let out something which Michel told me in confidence."

"Really? I don't know what you mean."

Mila noticed that Magnani's hand trembled. She ventured to strike a decisive blow.

"Well," she said, in an artless, almost indifferent

tone, "I told the princess that you were really very kind, very pleasant and very learned; but that one had either to know you very well, or else guess at you in order to find it out!"

"Because——?"

"Because you were in love, and that made you so melancholy that you lived almost entirely alone, buried in meditation."

Magnani trembled.

"It was Michel who told you that!" he said, in a changed tone that made Mila's heart bleed. "And doubtless he betrayed my confidence to the end," he added; "he told you the name——"

"Oh! Michel is incapable of betraying anybody's confidence," she replied, struggling to maintain her courage at the level of the crisis she had provoked; "and I, Magnani, am incapable of leading my brother on to such a base thing. Besides, why should I be at all interested, I should like to know?"

"Of course, it must be a matter of entire indifference to you," replied Magnani, completely crushed.

"Indifference is not the word," she said; "I have much esteem and friendship for you, Magnani, and I pray for your happiness. But I am interested in my own happiness, too, so that I have no time to be idle and pry into other people's secrets."

"Your happiness! At your age, Mila, happiness is love; so you are in love, too, are you?"

"In love? why not? Do you consider me too young to think about such things?"

"Ah! my dear child, you are at the age when one should think about such things, for at my age love is despair."

"Why, is your love not returned? I was not mistaken in thinking that you are unhappy?"

"No, my love is not returned," he replied, dejectedly, "and never will be; I have never even dreamed that it would."

A more romantic and more experienced woman than Mila might have looked upon that admission as a definitive obstacle to all hope; but her ideas of life were more simple and more logical: "If he has no hope, he will recover," she thought.

"I pity you deeply," she said to Magnani, "for it is such great happiness to feel that one is loved, and it must be so ghastly to love all by oneself!"

"You will never know such a misfortune," Magnani replied; "and the man you love should be the most grateful and the proudest of men!"

"I am satisfied with him," she said, gratified to feel that jealousy was beginning to make itself felt in the young man's perturbed heart; "but listen, Magnani! there is a noise in my brother's room."

Magnani ran to the other door; but, while he was making vain efforts to distinguish the nature of the noises Mila had heard, she heard other noises in the yard. She looked through the blind, and, beckoning to Magnani, pointed out to him Michel's mysterious guest, who was gliding toward the street so lightly and adroitly, that unless one had a delicate ear and keen eye and was on the alert, expecting to see him, it would have been impossible to detect his movements.

Even Michel had not been roused from the light doze into which he had fallen.

Mila was still very ill at ease, although Magnani urged her to take some rest, promising that he would remain in the yard or in the gallery, and that Michel should not leave the house without him. As soon as Magnani had left her, she fell upon a chair and drew her table noisily

along the floor, so that she might hear Michel wake and move about in his turn.

The young man soon entered her room, after noticing with amazement that the Piccinino's light body had left little more impression on his bed than if he had been a spectre. He found little Mila still up, and reproved her for her wilful sleeplessness. But she explained her reasons for anxiety; and, without mentioning Magnani, for the princess had enjoined upon her not to let Michel know of his presence, she told him of the Piccinino's strange and impudent visit to her room. She also told him something of her experience with the monk, and made him promise that he would not leave her during the morning, and that, if he were summoned by the princess later in the day, he would not go out without letting her know, because she was determined to seek shelter with some friend and not remain alone in the house.

Michel readily agreed. He was utterly unable to understand the bandit's conduct on that occasion. But we can imagine that such an audacious performance, taken in connection with the impertinence of the pretended monk, left him in a decidedly uncomfortable frame of mind.

When he returned to his chamber, after barricading the door of the gallery with his own hands in order to protect his sister against any fresh attack, he looked about for the cyclamen upon which he had gazed so sorrowfully as he sat beside his table. But the cyclamen had disappeared. The Piccinino had noticed that the princess, as on the evening of the ball, had a bouquet of cyclamen in her hand or close at hand, and that she seemed to have contracted the habit of playing with that bouquet even more than with her fan, the inseparable companion of all the women of the South. He had also

noticed that Michel treasured one of those flowers, and that he had drawn it toward his face several times, then hastily pushed it away, during the first agitated moments of his vigil. He had divined the mysterious charm attached to that plant, and before leaving the room he had maliciously taken it from the glass upon which Michel's inert hand still rested. He threw the little flower into the sheath of his dagger, saying to himself: "If I stab anyone to-day, perhaps this memento of the lady of my thoughts will remain in the wound."

Michel tried to follow the Piccinino's example, that is to say, to recover his lucidity of thought by enjoying an hour or two of real sleep. He had insisted that Mila should go to bed, and, in order to make surer that she was adequately guarded, he left the door open between their rooms. He slept heavily, as young men of his age do, but his sleep was disturbed by confused and distressing dreams, an inevitable consequence of his present position. When he woke, shortly after daylight, he tried to collect his thoughts, and first of all he looked to see if he had not dreamed of the abstraction of the precious cyclamen.

His surprise was unbounded when he saw that the glass, empty when he fell asleep, was filled with freshly gathered cyclamens.

"Mila," he said, seeing that his sister was already up and dressed, "you have cheerful and poetic ideas, I see, despite our anxieties and dangers. These flowers are almost as lovely as you; but they can never replace the one I have lost."

"You imagined," she said, "that I had taken it or tipped over the glass after your extraordinary friend went away; you almost scolded me, and you refused to remember that I had never so much as thought of putting

my foot inside your *mysterious* chamber! Now, you accuse me of replacing it with others, which is no less absurd; for where could I have got them? Am I not barricaded on the gallery side? Haven't you my key under your pillow? Unless, indeed, these pretty little flowers grow on my pillow, which is possible—in a dream."

"Mila, you persist in jesting on all subjects and at all seasons. You may have had this bouquet last night. Weren't you at Villa Palmarosa in the afternoon?"

"For heaven's sake, don't these flowers grow anywhere but in Princess Agatha's boudoir? I understand now why you are so fond of them. Where, pray, did you pick the one that you looked for so long this morning, instead of going straight to bed?"

"I picked it in my hair, little one, and I believe that my brains left my head with it."

"Ah! very good; now I understand why you talk nonsense."

Michel could find out nothing more. Mila was as calm and smiling when she woke as she had been disturbed and fearful when she fell asleep. He obtained nothing from her but quips of the sort in which she was proficient, always possessed of some metaphorical meaning, and instinct with a sort of childish charm.

She asked him for the key of her room, and while he was dressing, lost in thought, she attended to her household duties with her usual activity and lightness of heart. She flew about the corridors and stairways, singing like the morning lark. Michel, as melancholy as the winter sun on the ice-fields at the pole, heard the floors creaking under her agile feet, heard her merry laugh as she received her father's kiss on the floor below, heard her ascend the stairs to her room, like a well-aimed arrow, then go down again to the fountain to fill the graceful

earthen jugs, which are made at Siacca, after Moorish models, and are commonly used by the people of those regions; heard her salute the neighbors with kindly pleasantries, and play with the half naked children who were already beginning to roll about on the flagstones in the yard.

Pier-Angelo was also dressing, more rapidly and in more cheerful mood than Michel. Like Mila, he sang, but in a deeper and more martial voice, as he shook his brown, red-lined jacket. He was interrupted at times by a lingering remnant of drowsiness, and yawned over the words of his ballads, then finished the refrain triumphantly. That was his way of waking, and he never sang better, in his own ears, than when his voice failed him.

"Happy heedlessness of truly popular natures!" said Michel to himself, as he leaned on his window-sill, half-dressed. "One would say that nothing unusual was taking place in my family, that we were not surrounded by enemies and snares; that my sister slept as usual last night, that she knows nothing of love without hope, of the danger of being beautiful and poor in view of the schemes of vicious minds, and of the other danger that she may be deprived at any moment of her natural protectors. My father, who must know everything, acts as if he suspected nothing. In this wretched climate everything is forgotten or takes on an entirely different aspect in the twinkling of an eye. The volcano, tyranny, persecution—nothing interrupts the songs and laughter. At noon, overwhelmed by the heat, they all sleep and seem like corpses. The cool evening air revives them like vigorous plants. Terror and rashness, grief and joy, succeed one another with them like the waves on the shore. Let one of the chords of the heart be relaxed,

and twenty others wake to new life, just as the taking of a flower from a glass of water causes a whole bouquet to appear there! I alone, amid these incomprehensible transformations, am always on the alert, but always serious; my thoughts are always lucid, but always gloomy. Ah! would that I had remained the child of my caste and the man of my native land!"

XXXII

THE ESCALADE

The group of houses of which Michel's formed a part was shabby and ugly in reality, but exceedingly picturesque. Built upon blocks of lava, and in part constructed of the same lava, those rough structures bore traces of the last earthquakes which had overturned them. The lower floors, which were bolted to the solid rock, retained an unmistakable flavor of antiquity; and the upper portions, erected in haste after the disaster, or already shaken by later shocks, even now had a decrepit look: huge cracks, roofs with a threatening pitch, and dangerous staircases, the rails of which were all awry. Wild vines inextricably tangled about the ragged protuberances of cornices and awnings, prickly aloes, crushing by their weight the old terra-cotta urns, and encroaching with their rough branches upon the little terraces which hovered in the most insane way upon the highest points of those tumble-down buildings; white linen, or garments of gaudy hue hanging from all the windows, or flying about like ban-

ners on lines stretched from house to house: all this formed a strange, bold picture. One could see children playing and women working almost among the clouds, on narrow platforms surrounded by pigeons and swallows, and barely protected, away up there in space, by a few black, worm-eaten rails, which it seemed that the first gust of wind would blow away. The slightest change of level in that volcanic soil, the slightest convulsion in that gorgeous but ill-omened landscape, and the torpid or reckless occupants of those houses would be engulfed in a raging hell, or swept away as the leaves are by the tempest.

But danger acts upon men's minds in proportion to its distance. In the midst of actual security, the idea of a catastrophe presents itself under terror-inspiring colors. When one is born, breathes and lives in the midst of actual danger, under a never-ceasing threat, the imagination becomes deadened, fear loses its keen edge, and there ensues a strange repose of mind which resembles torpor rather than courage.

Although the picture we have described possessed a genuine poetic charm, in its very shabbiness and its disorder, Michel had not yet detected it. He had passed his childhood at Rome, in houses more solidly constructed at all events and of a neater aspect, if not more sumptuous, and his thoughts always aspired to the splendor of palaces. His father's abode, that hovel in which Pier-Angelo had lived ever since his childhood, and to which he had returned with so much love in his heart, seemed to young Michel nothing more than a pestiferous den which he would have been glad to see return to the lava from which it had come forth. In vain did Mila, in marked contrast to her neighbors, keep their little quarters almost fastidiously neat and clean. In vain was their staircase embellished with the loveliest flowers.

In vain did the bright morning sun draw broad lines of gold athwart the shadows of the black lava and upon the heavy arches of the recessed portions of the building. Michel thought of nothing but the grotto of the naiad, the marble fountains of the Palmarosa palace, and the porch where Agatha had appeared to him like a goddess in the doorway of her temple.

At last, after bestowing one regretful thought upon his recent chimera, he was ashamed of his dejection. "I came to this country, when my father hadn't sent for me," he said to himself, "and my uncle the monk convinced me that I must submit to the drawbacks of my position and accept its duties. I subjected myself to a most severe test when I turned my back upon Rome and the hope of glory to become an obscure workingman in Sicily. The test would have been too mild and too short if, at the outset, being loved or admired at first sight by a great and noble lady, I had had only to stoop and pick up laurel crowns and piastres. Instead of that, I must be a good son and a good brother, and, moreover, a stout-hearted man, to defend at need the honor of my family. I am well assured that the signora's esteem and my own, perhaps, can be had only at that price. Very well, I will accept my destiny cheerfully, and learn to endure without regret what my nearest and dearest endure so courageously. I will be a man in advance of my years, and lay aside the overpetted personality of my youth. If I have anything to blush for, it is for having been a spoiled child so long, and for having failed to see that it would soon be my duty to assist and protect those who devoted themselves to me so unselfishly."

This determination restored peace to his heart. His father's songs and little Mila's seemed to him the sweetest of melodies.

"Yes, yes," he said to himself, "sing on, happy birds of the South, pure as the sky that looked down upon your birth! This merriment is the indication of a perfectly clear conscience, and laughter well befits you, who have never had an idea of evil! Ah! my old father's dear old ballads, which have allayed the anxieties of his life and lessened the fatigue of his labor—I should listen to them with respect instead of smiling at their simplicity! And my young sister's merry laughter I should welcome with affectionate delight as a proof of her courage and her innocence! Away with my selfish dreams and my unfeeling curiosity! I will go through the storm with you, and will enjoy as you do a burst of sunlight between two clouds. My careworn brow is an insult to your candor—black ingratitude for your kindness. I propose to be your staff in distress, your comrade in toil, and your boon companion in joy!

"Sweet and melancholy flowers," he added, stooping fondly over the bouquet of cyclamen, "whatever hand plucked you, whatever the sentiment of which you are a pledge, my breath, aflame with evil desires, shall sully you no more. If I sometimes lay bare my heart, as you do, I pray that it may be as pure as your calices; and if it bleeds, as you seem to bleed, I pray that virtue may exhale from its wounds, even as fragrance exhales from your bosom."

Immediately after forming these excellent resolutions, made more seductive by this vein of poetic imagery, young Michel completed his toilet without further dallying, and made haste to join his father, who was already at work mixing colors to *patch* the paint at Villa Palmarosa in many places where it had been marred by the chandeliers and decorations of the ball.

"Here," said the goodman, handing him a large purse

of Tunisian silk, filled with gold pieces; "here is the pay for your beautiful ceiling."

"It is too much by half," said Michel, examining the beautifully embroidered and shaded purse with much more interest than its contents. "Our debt to the princess is not yet discharged, and I propose that it shall be this very day."

"It is, my child."

"Then it must have been paid out of your wages, not out of mine. For if I know how to estimate the contents of a purse, there is more here than I propose to accept. Father, I do not propose that you shall work for me. No, I swear by your gray hairs that you shall never work for your son again, for it is his turn to work for you. Nor do I intend to accept alms from Princess Agatha; I have had enough of such patronage and generosity."

"You know me well enough," replied Pier-Angelo, with a smile, "to believe that, far from interfering with your pride and your dutiful sentiments, I shall always encourage them. Take my advice, therefore, and accept this money. It is honestly yours; it costs me nothing, and the person who gives it to you is at liberty to place what estimate she pleases on the merits of your work. That is the difference that there will always be between you and your father, Michel. An artist has no fixed price. A single day of inspiration may make him rich. Whereas, a deal of hard work is not enough to raise us mechanics out of the slough of poverty. But God, in His mercy, has given us compensations. The artist conceives and brings forth his works with much pain. The mechanic performs his task with laughter and a song. I am so accustomed to that, that I wouldn't exchange my trade for yours."

"Let me at least derive from mine such pleasure as it

is capable of affording me," said Michel. "Take this purse, father, and let nothing ever be taken from it for my use. It is my sister's marriage portion; it is the interest on the money she lent me when I was at Rome; and if I never earn enough to make her richer, let her at least have the benefit of my day of success. O father!" he cried, seeing that Pier-Angelo was unwilling to accept his sacrifice, "do not refuse me; you will break my heart! Your blind affection has almost corrupted my nature. Help me to cease to be the selfish creature that you would have made me. Encourage my good impulses, instead of robbing me of their fruit. It comes only too late."

"True, my boy, I ought to do it," said Pier-Angelo, deeply touched; "but consider that this is no mere commonplace sacrifice of money that you propose to make. If it were simply a matter of depriving yourself of some little pleasure, it would be of little consequence, and I should not hesitate. But your artistic future, the cultivation of your intellect, the very essence of your life, are contained in this little silk net! It means a year of study in Rome! And who knows when you will be able to earn as much more? Perhaps the princess won't give any more balls. The other nobles are neither so rich nor so generous as she. Such opportunities are not often met with, and are very likely not to happen twice in a lifetime. I am growing old; I may fall from my ladder tomorrow and cripple myself; then how would you resume the life of an artist? Aren't you at all alarmed at the idea that, for the pleasure of giving your sister a marriage portion, you run the risk of becoming a mechanic again, and remaining a mechanic all your life?"

"So be it!" exclaimed Michel; "that no longer frightens me, father. I have reflected. It seems to me that

there is as much honor and pleasure in being a mechanic as in being rich and proud. I love Sicily! Is it not my native land? I do not propose to leave my sister again. She needs a protector until she is married, and I propose that she shall be able to make her choice deliberately. You are old, you say! you may be crippled to-morrow! Well then! who would take care of you, pray,—who would support you, who would comfort you,—if I were away? Would it be possible for my sister to do it when she has a family of her own? A son-in-law? but why should I leave it for another to fulfill my duties? Why should he steal my honor and my glory? for this is wherein I choose to establish them henceforth, and my chimeras have given place to reality. Tell me, father, am not I, too, in a cheerful mood this morning? Would you like me to sing a second to the old ballad you were singing just now? Do I seem to you to have the despairing look of a man who is sacrificing himself? Do you not love me, I pray to know, that you refuse to be my employer?"

"Very well!" replied Pier-Angelo, gazing at him with glistening eyes, and with a trembling of the hands that indicated extraordinary emotion. "You are a man of heart! and I shall never regret what I have done for you!"

As he spoke, Pier-Angelo removed his cap, uncovering his bald head, and stood erect in the attitude, at once proud and respectful, of an old soldier before his young officer. It was the first time in his life that he had adopted the more formal mode of address with Michel,* and that change, which might have seemed to denote coldness and dissatisfaction in other fathers, assumed in his mouth a peculiarly affectionate and majestic meaning. It seemed to the young painter that he had been hailed

* That is to say, had called him *you* instead of *thou*.

as a man by his father at last, and that that form of address—that uncovered head and those few calm and serious words—rewarded and honored him more abundantly than the most eloquent academic eulogy.

While they worked together, Mila busied herself preparing their breakfast. She went back and forth from one room to another, but passed more frequently than was absolutely necessary along the gallery of which we have spoken. She had a secret reason for this. Magnani's chamber, which, to tell the truth, was only a wretched garret with a window in which there was no glass—the warm climate making that luxury unnecessary for people in good health—was at the corner of the house nearest to the gallery, and by leaning over the rail one could talk with a person who happened to be sitting at the window of that modest apartment. Magnani was not in his room; he only passed the night there, and at daylight went to his work elsewhere, or worked out-of-doors on the gallery opposite the one on which Mila often sat at her work. From there she could watch him without looking at him, for hours at a time, and not lose a single one of his movements, although she did not seem to lift her eyes from her work.

But on this morning she walked back and forth to no purpose. He was not on the gallery, although he had promised her, as well as the princess, not to go away from home. Had he allowed himself to be overcome by sleep, after two sleepless nights? That was hardly consistent with what she knew of his stoical determination and of his inexhaustible strength. Doubtless he was breakfasting with his parents. But Mila, who had stopped more than once to listen to the tumultuous voices of the Magnani family, could not distinguish the grave, manly tones which she knew so well.

She looked at the window of his garret. The room was dark and empty as usual. Magnani had no luxurious habits as Michel had, and he had always crushed within himself any craving for refinement in his surroundings. Whereas Pier-Angelo and his daughter, in anticipation of the cardinal's death and the young painter's arrival, had made ready for that beloved child a neat, clean, airy attic chamber, furnished with the best that they could spare from their own furniture, Magnani slept on a rug thrown on the floor by his window, to make the most of the little air which could find its way in through that loophole, recessed as it was between two walls. The only embellishment which he had introduced consisted of a box which he had placed on the outer edge of that yawning aperture, and in which he had sown a few pretty convolvuli which formed a frame of fresh flowers for the window.

He watered them every day; but during the last forty-eight hours he had been so engrossed that he had forgotten them; the pretty white bells had closed and drooped languidly upon their half-withered leaves.

Mila, carrying one of her earthen jugs perched lightly on her head, an enormous braid of hair thrice twisted acting as a cushion, noticed that her neighbor's convolvuli were dying of thirst; that would have afforded a pretext for speaking to him if he had been anywhere about; but there was nobody in that retired and sheltered corner. Mila tried, by stretching her arm over the rail, to reach the poor plants and give them a few drops of water. But her arm was too short, and the jug did not reach the box. Children cannot bear the impossible, and when they have undertaken a thing they go on with it at the peril of their lives. How many times have we climbed upon a window to reach a swallow's nest,

and counted with the tips of our fingers the little warm eggs on their bed of down!

Little Mila spied a stout branch of grapevine which hung along the wall like a bell-rope and was twisted about the rail of the gallery. To climb over the rail and cling to the vine did not seem to her very difficult. In this way she reached the window. But, as she raised her lovely arm to water the convolvuli, a strong hand seized her slender wrist, and a brown face, wearing a smile that displayed two rows of large white teeth, stooped toward hers.

Magnani, not wishing to sleep, nor, on the other hand, to seem to be watching what was taking place in the house, as Agatha had ordered, had lain down on his rug to rest his weary limbs. But his mind and his eyes were wide open, and, at every risk, he had seized that stealthy arm whose shadow passed across his face.

"Let me go, Magnani," said the girl, more deeply moved by the meeting than by the risk she might be incurring; "you will throw me down! this vine is giving way under me."

"Throw you down, my dear child!" replied the young man, passing a powerful arm about her waist. "Unless this arm is cut off, and then the other, you shall never fall!"

"Never? that is saying a good deal, for I love to climb, and you won't always be with me."

"Happy the man who will be with you always and everywhere, sweet little Mila! But what are you doing here with the birds?"

"I saw from my window that this lovely plant was thirsty. See how its pretty head droops and how its leaves are falling. I thought that you were not here, and I was going to give the poor roots something to drink.

Here is the jug. You can bring it back to me by and by. I am going back to my work."

"Already, Mila?"

"Especially as I am very uncomfortable perched up here. I have had enough of it. Let me go, so that I can return the way I came."

"No, no, it is too dangerous. The vine is bending, and my arms aren't long enough to hold you till you reach the gallery. Let me lift you in here, Mila, and then you can go out through my chamber."

"I can't do that, Magnani; the neighbors would say unkind things of me, if they saw me go into your room either by the window or by the door."

"Very well, stay there, hold on tight; I will come out through the window and help you to go back."

But it was too late: the vine suddenly gave way; Mila shrieked, and if Magnani had not grasped her with both hands and seated her on the edge of the window, crushing his dear convolvuli a little in the act, she would have fallen.

"Now," he said, "my imprudent young lady, you cannot go out any other way than through my room. Come in quickly, for I hear steps under the gallery, and no one has seen you yet."

He drew her hastily into his poor room, and she walked to the door as swiftly as she had come in through the window; but the door was ajar, and as she looked out she saw that the door of the cobbler's room on the same landing was wide open, and that the cobbler himself, the most evil-tongued of all the neighbors, was sitting there, singing over his work, so that it was impossible to go out without exposing herself to his unpleasant witticisms.

XXXIII

THE RING

"There!" said the girl, closing the door with a touch of vexation, "the evil spirit has a grudge against me! Just because I took it into my head to water a poor flower, I am in danger of being torn to pieces by evil tongues and scolded by my father—and above all by Michel, who is such a tease with me!"

"Dear child," said Magnani, "people would not dare to speak of you as they speak of others; you are so different from all the other girls in our suburb! Everybody loves you and respects you as no one of them will ever be loved and respected. Besides, as it is on my account—or rather on account of my poor flowers—that you have run this risk, you need not have the slightest fear. Woe to the man who dares to speak ill of you!"

"All the same, I shall never dare to pass that horrible cobbler."

"You are quite right. It is his breakfast time. His wife has called him twice already. He will go directly. Wait here a few seconds, perhaps a minute—especially as I should like to say a word to you, Mila."

"What have you to say to me, pray?" she replied, taking a chair which he offered her, and which was the only one in the room. She was trembling with violent inward excitement, but she affected a careless air which her position seemed to impose upon her. It was not that she was afraid of Magnani; she knew him too well to

fear that he would take advantage of the tête-à-tête; but she feared, more than ever before, that he would guess the secret of her heart.

"I don't know just what I have to say to you," rejoined Magnani. "It seemed to me that it would be for you to say something to me."

"I!" cried proud little Mila, rising. "I have nothing to say to you, I give you my word, Signor Magnani!"

And she was about to leave the room, preferring the gossip of the neighborhood to the danger of being found out by the man she loved, when Magnani, surprised by her movement, and observing her sudden flush, began to suspect the truth.

"Dear Mila," he said, placing himself in front of the door, "one moment's patience, I beg you. Do not let people see you, and do not be angry with me if I detain you a moment. The consequences of a pure accident may be very serious to a man who is determined to kill or be killed to defend the honor of a woman."

"In that case, do not speak so loud," said Mila, struck by Magnani's expression; "for that miserable cobbler may overhear us. I know," she continued, allowing him to lead her back to her chair, "that you are brave and generous, and that you would do for me what you would do for your own sister. But I am not anxious that that should happen, for you are not my brother, and you cannot justify me by fighting my battles. People would say all the more evil of me, or else we should be compelled to marry, which would not suit either of us."

Magnani gazed into Mila's black eyes, and, seeing how proud they were, he speedily renounced the presumptuous idea that had caused him both fear and pleasure as it flashed through his mind.

"I understand perfectly well that you do not love me,

my dear Mila," he said with a sad smile. "I am not lovable, and it would be the most melancholy thing on earth, after being compromised by me, to pass your life with such an unsociable being."

"That is not what I meant to say," replied the crafty maiden. "I have much esteem and friendship for you; I have no reason for concealing that fact from you; but I have an inclination for another. That is why I am so distressed and tremble so at being shut up in this room with you."

"If that is so, Mila," said Magnani, bolting his door and closing the window-shutter so hastily that he nearly consummated the ruin of his convolvulus, "let us take all necessary precautions to prevent anyone knowing that you are here. I swear to you that you shall go out without anybody suspecting it, though I have to put all the neighbors out of the way by force—though I have to stand guard until night."

Magnani tried to be playful, and imagined that he was very much relieved to find that he was not called upon to defend himself against Mila's love; but it saddened him to hear the girl declare her affection for another, and his candid face expressed, despite his efforts, a painful disappointment. Had she not previously confessed it to him during their long vigil, and had she not by that confidence invested him in a certain sense with the duties of a brother? He was determined to execute worthily that sacred mission; but how did it happen that a moment before it had startled him to see her in anger, and why had his heart, nourished so long upon an insane and bitter passion, felt suddenly revivified and rejuvenated by the unexpected presence of this child who had entered through his window like a sunbeam?

Mila was stealthily watching him. She saw that she

had struck home. "O untamed heart," she said to herself, with silent but intense joy, "I have you now; you shall not escape me."

"My dear neighbor," said the artful minx, "pray do not be offended at what I have just told you, and do not look upon it as an affront to your merit. I know that any other than myself would be flattered to be compromised by you, with the hope of becoming your wife; but I am neither a liar nor a flirt. I am in love, and, as I have confidence in you, I tell you of it. I know that it cannot cause you any pain, since you have given up all thought of marriage, and since you detest all women, except a single one who is not myself."

Magnani made no reply. The cobbler was still singing. "It is my fate," thought Magnani, "not to be loved by any woman and never to be cured of my love."

Mila, inspired by that species of divination which love gives to women, even to those who have had no experience and have read but little, said to herself—and justly—that Magnani, being stimulated in his passion by suffering and absence of hope, would be alarmed and repelled at the idea of love being offered to him unasked—a too-ready, alluring love; consequently she represented herself as invulnerable and protected against him by another attachment. In that way she lured him by making him suffer, and that was, in truth, the only way in which he could be lured. By changing the form of his torture, she paved the way for his cure.

"Mila," he said to her at last, pointing to a heavy ring of chased gold which he wore on his finger, and which she had already noticed, "can you tell me the source of this beautiful present?"

"That?" she said, looking at the ring with feigned astonishment. "It is impossible for me to tell you any-

thing about it. But I no longer hear your neighbor; farewell. By the way, Magnani, you look very tired. You were resting when I came in; you would do well to rest a little more. None of us are in any danger at this moment. I am not, because my father and brother are about the house. They are not, because it is broad daylight and the house is full of people. Sleep, my dear neighbor. If it is only for an hour, that will give you strength to go on with your rôle of guardian of the family."

"No, no, Mila. I shall not sleep, and, indeed, I have no desire to; for, say what you will, there are some strange, inexplicable things still going on in this house. I confess that I lost myself a moment, just as day was breaking. You were asleep; you were locked into your room; the man in the cloak had gone. I had sat down under your gallery, saying to myself that the first step that shook it would wake me instantly if I should happen to fall asleep. And thereupon I did actually fall asleep. For five minutes perhaps, not more, for it was not perceptibly lighter when I woke again. Well! when I opened my eyes, I fancied that I saw a corner of a dress or a black veil, which flitted by me and disappeared like a flash. I made a vague, fruitless effort to seize that vision with the hand that lay half open on the bench at my side. But in my hand, or beside it—I don't know which—was an object which I dropped at my feet, and instantly picked up again: it was this ring. Have you any idea to whom it belongs?"

"Such a fine ring cannot belong to anyone in the house," Mila replied; "but I think I know it."

"And I know it, too," said Magnani; "it belongs to Princess Agatha. For five years I have seen it on her finger, and it was there the day she came into my mother's room."

"It is a ring that came to her from her own mother, she told me so! But how does it happen to be on your hand to-day?"

"I relied upon you to explain that prodigy to me, Mila; that is what I wanted to ask you."

"Upon me? Why upon me?"

"You are the only one in this house in whom the princess is sufficiently interested to have given her so handsome a present."

"And if she had given it to me," she said, in a superb and mocking tone, "do you suppose that I would have deprived myself of it in your favor, Signor Magnani?"

"No, surely not; you should not and would not have done it; but you might have passed along the gallery and dropped it, for I was just under the rail."

"No, I did not! Besides, didn't you see a black dress beside you? Am I dressed in black?"

"I thought, however, that you might have gone down into the yard during that moment that I was asleep, and that, to punish me or to make sport of me, you played that joke on me. If that is the case, Mila, you must agree that the punishment was too light, and you ought to have poured water on my face instead of keeping it for my flowers. But take your ring, I don't want to keep it any longer. It wouldn't be a suitable thing for me to wear, and I should be afraid of losing it."

"I swear to you that that ring was never given to me, that I did not go into the yard while you were asleep; and I will not take what belongs to you."

"As it is impossible that Princess Agatha should have come here this morning——"

"Oh! to be sure, that is impossible!" said Mila, with mischievous gravity.

"And yet she did come here!" said Magnani, thinking

that he could read the truth in her gleaming eyes. "Yes, yes, Mila, she came here this morning! You are impregnated with the perfume that her clothes exhale; either you touched her cape, or she kissed you, not more than an hour ago."

"Great heaven!" thought the girl, "how well he knows everything that has any connection with Princess Agatha! how shrewdly he guesses, when she is in question! Suppose it were she with whom he is in love? Well! God grant that it may be, for she will help me to cure him; she loves me so dearly!"

"You don't answer me, Mila," continued Magnani. "Since you are found out, confess."

"I do not even know what you said," she replied; "I was thinking about something else—about going away!"

"I will help you; but first I will beg you to put this ring on your finger so that you may return it to Princess Agatha; for she surely lost it when she passed me."

"And supposing that she did come here, which is absurd, my dear neighbor, why should she not have made you this present?"

"Because she must know me well enough to be sure that I would not accept it."

"You are proud!"

"Very proud, you have said it, my dear Mila! It is not in the power of any person to put a material price on the devotion which my heart gives joyfully. I can conceive that a great nobleman may present a gold chain or a diamond to the artist who has delighted him for an hour by his genius, but I could never understand why he should want to pay the man of the people from whom he feels justified in asking a proof of affection. Moreover, that would not be the case here. In notifying me that your brother was in some danger, Princess Agatha sim-

ply pointed out to me a duty, which I should have performed as zealously if anyone else had given me the same warning. It seems to me that I am sufficiently her friend and your father's, and I might also venture to say yours, to be ready to stand guard, to fight, and to go to prison for one of you, without being hired to do so by anyone. Don't you believe it, Mila?"

"I do believe it, my friend," she replied; "but I believe also that you misinterpret this gift altogether, if it is a gift. Princess Agatha knows better than you or I that friendship is not to be bought with money and jewels. But she probably feels, as you and I do, that when friendly hearts unite to aid one another, esteem and sympathy increase in proportion to the zeal which each one displays. In many cases a ring is a pledge of friendship, not payment for service rendered; for you have rendered the princess a service by protecting us, that is certain; although I do not know how it comes about, her cause is bound up with ours, and our enemies are hers. If you reflect on what I have told you, you will realize that this ring has a sentimental value in the princess's eyes, not a material value, as you say; for it is a trinket not especially valuable in itself."

"You told me that it came to her from her mother, did you not?" said Magnani, deeply moved.

"And you yourself noticed that she always wore it! If I were in your place, and were sure that that ring had been given to me, I would never part with it. I would not wear it on my finger, where it would attract too much attention from envious creatures, but on my heart, where it would be like a blessed relic."

"In that case, my dear Mila," said Magnani, touched by the extreme delicacy with which the girl tried to allay the bitterness of his heart, and to make him accept her

rival's gift with pleasure, "in that case, take this ring back to her, and if she really meant to give it to me, if she insists upon my keeping it, I will keep it."

"And you will wear it on your heart as I told you?" asked Mila, looking him through and through with courageous but anxious eyes. "Remember," she added, vehemently, "that it is the pledge of a patron saint; that the woman whom you love, whoever she may be, cannot deserve that you should sacrifice it to her, and that it would be far better to throw it into the sea than to profane it by an act of ingratitude!"

Magnani was dazzled by the flame that flashed from Mila's great black eyes. Did she guess the truth? Perhaps! but if she simply relied upon Magnani's gratitude for the woman who had saved his mother, she was no less noble and generous in seeking to procure for him the pleasure of believing in that good fairy's friendship. He began to feel infected by the chaste and deep-rooted ardor which she carried concealed in her heart, and that proud and passionate heart revealed itself against its will, amid its efforts to subdue itself or to keep quiet.

An impulsive outburst of gratitude and tenderness brought Magnani to his knees at the girl's feet.

"Mila," he said, "I know that Princess Agatha is a saint, and I do not know whether my heart is worthy to receive a relic from her. But I do know that there is but a single other heart in the world to which I would be willing to entrust it; so never fear; no woman, except you, will ever seem to me pure enough to wear this ring. Put it on your finger now, in order to give it back to the princess or to keep it for me."

Mila, when she had returned to her room, had a moment's dizziness, as if she were going to faint. Her heart

throbbed wildly with mingled feelings of consternation and delirious joy. At last she heard her father, who was impatient for his breakfast, crying:

"Well, little one, we are hungry, and thirsty above all! for it's hot already and the paints make your throat dry."

Mila hastened to wait upon them; but when she placed her jug on the table at which they were breakfasting, she noticed that it was empty. Michel offered to go and refill it, after making fun of her absent-mindedness. Sensitive to the reproof, and making it a point of honor to be her old father's only servant, Mila snatched the jug from him and ran lightly to the fountain.

This fountain was a beautifully clear spring which gushed from the very heart of the lava, in a sort of cliff behind the house. It not infrequently happens in those regions overrun by lava, that springs become choked up by volcanic matter and disappear, to appear again after the lapse of several years. The people dig in search of the former bed. They find that the water has broken out a passage under the cold fires of the volcano, and, as soon as it is given an opportunity, it rushes to the surface, as pure and healthful as before. The one which bathed the base of Pier-Angelo's house bubbled up at the bottom of a deep excavation that had been made in the rock, to which a picturesque staircase led. It formed a little basin for the laundresses, and a quantity of white linen, hung upon all the walls of the grotto, kept it constantly dark and cool there. Pretty Mila, as she tripped up and down that steep staircase ten times a day, with her jug upon her head, was a most perfect model for those classical figures which the painters of the last century inevitably placed in all their Italian landscapes; and in truth what more

natural accessory, what more charming *local color* could one give to those pictures than the faces and costumes, the majestic yet sprightly attitudes of those graceful, brown nymphs?

XXXIV

AT THE FOUNTAIN

When Mila descended the staircase cut in the rock, she saw a man sitting on the edge of the spring, but was not alarmed. Her heart was all full of love and hope, and the recollection of the dangers that threatened her was powerless to affect her. Even when she reached the brink of the spring, this man, whose back was turned to her, and whose head and body were enveloped in the long hooded cape which the common people wear,* did not arouse her suspicions; but when he turned and asked her in a soft voice if she would permit him to drink from her jug, she started; for it seemed to her that she recognized the voice, and she noticed that there was no one in sight, either above or below the fountain; that not a child was playing on the staircase as usual, in fact, that she was alone with this stranger, whose voice terrified her.

She pretended not to have heard him, hastily filled her jug, and prepared to go up again. But the stranger, re-

* It is a double woolen *surtout*, of several different colors inside and out. It is worn as a protection against the sun's heat as well as against the cold.

clining on the stones, either to bar her way or perhaps to rest more comfortably, said to her in the same caressing tone:

"Rebecca, will you refuse a drop of water to Jacob, the friend and servant of the family?"

"I do not know you," replied Mila, trying to assume a calm and indifferent tone. "Can you not put your lips to the cascade? You can drink from it much better than from a jug."

The stranger calmly passed his arms around Mila's legs, and compelled her to lean on his shoulder to avoid falling.

"Let me go," she said, terrified and angry, "or I will call for help. I have no time to jest with you, and I am not one of those who dally with every strange man they see. Let me go, I tell you, or I will shriek."

"Mila," said the unknown, throwing back his hood, "I am no stranger to you, although it is not long since we became acquainted. We have relations together which it is not in your power to break off, and which it is your duty not to refuse to recognize. The life, fortune, and honor of those who are dearest to you on earth rest on my zeal and my loyalty. I have something to say to you; give me your jug, so that if anyone is watching it will not seem unnatural that you should have stopped here a moment with me."

On recognizing the mysterious guest of the previous night, Mila was subjugated as it were by a sort of dread not unmingled with respect. For we must tell the whole truth: Mila was a woman, and the Piccinino's beauty, his youth, his expression and his soft voice did not fail to exert a secret influence upon her sensitive and slightly romantic instincts.

"My lord," she said to him, for it was impossible not to

take him for a nobleman in disguise, "I will obey you; but do not detain me by force, and speak more quickly, for this situation is not without danger to us both."

She handed him her jug, from which he drank without haste; for, meanwhile, he held the girl's lovely bare arm in his hand and gazed upon its beautiful shape, pressing it at the same time to force her to tip the jug gradually, as he quenched his real or pretended thirst.

"Now, Mila," he said, covering his face, which he had left uncovered for her to admire, "listen to me! The monk who frightened you yesterday will come here again as soon as your father and brother have gone out: they are to dine to-day with the Marquis della Serra. Do not try to keep them at home on any account; if they should stay at home, if they should see the monk, if they should try to drive him away, it would be the signal for some disaster which I could not prevent. If you are prudent and devoted to your family, you will even spare the monk the danger of showing himself in your house. You will come here as if to wash; I know that, before going into the house, he will prowl about here and will try to surprise you outside of your yard, for he is afraid of the neighbors. Do not be afraid of him; he is a coward, and he will never attempt to use violence with you in broad daylight, or when he is in any danger of being discovered. He will talk to you again of his ignoble desires. Cut the conversation short; but pretend that you have changed your mind. Tell him to go away because you are watched; but make an appointment with him for twenty o'clock* at a place which I will indicate, and whither you must go alone, an hour earlier. I will be there. You will run no risk therefore. I will take charge of the monk, and you will never hear of him again. You will be de-

* That is to say, four hours before nightfall.

livered from a detestable persecutor, Princess Agatha will no longer be in danger of being dishonored by shocking calumnies; your father will no longer have the threat of imprisonment hanging over him, and your brother Michel that of the assassin's dagger."

"Great God! great God!" said Mila, panting with fear and surprise, "this monk is so ill-disposed toward us and able to injure us so! Is he Abbé Ninfo?"

"Speak lower, girl, and do not let that accursed name reach the ears that surround you to-day. Be calm; seem to know nothing and to be doing nothing. If you say a word of all this to anybody, no matter who it may be, you will be prevented from saving those whom you love. You will be told to distrust me, because your own prudence and strength of will are distrusted. Who knows if I shall not be taken for your enemy? I am not afraid of anyone, but I am afraid that my friends will destroy themselves by their indecision. You alone can save them, Mila! Will you do it?"

"Yes, I will," she said; "but what will become of me if you are deceiving me? if you do not keep the appointment?"

"Why, don't you know who I am?"

"No, I do not know; no one was willing to tell me."

"Look at me, then; venture to examine me carefully, and you will know me better from my face than all those people do who have spoken to you about me."

He put aside his hood, and was able to give to his handsome face so reassuring and affectionate and gentle an expression, that the simple-hearted Mila yielded to its dangerous influence.

"It seems to me," she said, with a blush, "that you are kind and honest; if the devil is in you, he has put on the mask of an angel."

The Piccinino closed his hood to conceal the sensuous gratification afforded him by that artless confession from the loveliest lips in the world.

"Very well," he replied, "follow your instinct. Obey only the promptings of your heart; let me tell you, moreover, that your uncle at Bel Passo brought me up as his son, that your dear Princess Agatha has placed her fortune and her honor in my hands, and that, if she were not a woman, that is to say a bit of a prude, she would have made this most essential appointment with Abbé Ninfo."

"But I am a woman too," said Mila, "and I am afraid. Why is this appointment so essential?"

"Don't you know that I am to kidnap Abbé Ninfo? How can I seize him in the streets of Catania, or at the gates of Villa Ficarazzi? Must I not lure him out of his den, and lead him into a trap? His evil fate ordained that he should fall insanely in love with you."

"Oh! don't use the word love in connection with such a man; it makes me shudder. And you want me to make a pretence of encouraging him! I shall die of shame and disgust."

"Farewell, Mila," said the bandit, pretending to rise. "I see that you are a woman like other women, after all, a weak, vain creature, who thinks only of saving herself, utterly heedless of the calumnies and blows that may fall upon the heads which should be most sacred to her!"

"No, no, I am not like that!" she replied proudly. "I will sacrifice my life in this experiment; as for my honor, I shall find a way to die before it is stained."

"Good, good, my brave girl! Now you are talking as Fra Angelo's niece should talk. You see that I am per-

fectly undisturbed on your account, however, because I know that you are in no danger."

"But are not you in danger, my lord? If you fall, who will protect me against this monk?"

"A dagger thrust—not in your beautiful bosom, my poor angel, as you threaten, but in the throat of a vile beast, who is not worthy to die by a woman's hand, and who will never expose himself to that risk."

"Where must I agree to meet him?"

"At Nicolosi, at the house of Carmelo Tomabene, farmer, who, you will tell him, is your friend and kinsman. You will add that he is absent, that you have the keys of his house, and that there is a large sheltered garden which he can enter, unseen by anyone, by going down through the ravine of the *Destatore's Cross*. Can you remember all that?"

"Perfectly; and will he go?"

"He will go without any doubt, and without a suspicion that this Carmelo Tomabene is on very intimate terms with a certain Piccinino, who is said to be a leader of bandits, and to whom, only yesterday, he offered a princely fortune on condition that he would kidnap your brother and at need murder him."

"Blessed Madonna, protect me! The Piccinino! I have heard of him; he is a terrible man. Will he be there with you? I should die of fright if I saw him!"

"And yet," said the bandit, overjoyed to find that Mila knew so little of what was going on, "I will wager that, like all the girls in the neighborhood, you are dying with the longing to see him."

"I should rather like to see him, because they say he is so ugly! But I should want to be sure that he did not see me!"

"Never fear; there will be nobody but myself at the

farmer's house in Nicolosi. Tell me, are you afraid of me too, child that you are? Have I a very dreadful, very wicked look?"

"No, indeed you have not! But why must I keep the appointment? Won't it be enough if I send the abbé—I mean the monk?"

"He is suspicious, like all criminals; he will never go into Carmelo Tomabene's garden unless he sees you walking there all alone. By going there an hour in advance of the time fixed, you run no risk of meeting him on the road; at all events, go by the Bel Passo road, which you probably know better than the other. Have you ever been to Nicolosi?"

"Never, my lord; is it a very long way?"

"Too far for your little feet, Mila; but you can cling to a mule's back, can't you?"

"Oh! yes, I think so."

"You will find a perfectly safe, gentle beast behind Villa Palmarosa. A child will bring it to you, with a white rose for countersign. Drop the reins on the trusty creature's neck, and have no fear, but let him go as fast as he will. In less than an hour he will bring you to my gate, without once missing the way or taking a false step, however horrible the road he selects may seem to you. You won't be afraid, Mila?"

"And suppose I should meet the abbé?"

"Lash your beast, and don't be afraid that anyone will overtake you."

"But if I am to go by way of Bel Passo, you will surely allow my uncle to escort me?"

"No, your uncle has business elsewhere for the same good cause; but, if you notify him, he will insist upon accompanying you. If he sees you, he will follow you, and our whole undertaking will have come to naught. I

have no time to tell you more. I think that I hear some one calling you. You hesitate; does that mean that you refuse?"

"I am not hesitating; I will go! My lord, do you believe in God?"

This abrupt and ingenuous question made the Piccinino turn pale and smile at the same time.

"Why do you ask me that?" he said, pulling his hood over his face.

"Ah! you know why?" said she. "God hears and sees everything. He punishes falsehood and assists innocence!"

Again they heard Pier-Angelo's voice, calling his daughter.

"Go," said the Piccinino, supporting her with his hands, to assist her to mount the staircase quickly; "remember, if a single word escapes you, we are lost."

"You too?"

"I too!"

"That would be a pity," thought Mila, turning at the top of the staircase to cast a last glance at the comely stranger, of whom it was impossible not to make a hero and a friend of the first order, and whom, in her joyous imagination, she placed beside Agatha. He had such a soft voice and such a sweet smile! His tone was so noble, his authoritative air so convincing! "I will be brave and discreet," she said. "I am only a little girl, and yet I am the one who is to save everybody's life!" In all times, alas! the sparrow has yielded to the fascination of the vulture.

In all this the Piccinino gave way to an inborn passion for increasing the difficulties of an adventure to his profit, or simply for amusement. To be sure, he had no better way of enticing Abbé Ninfo to his house than by

offering a bait to his lust. But he might well have chosen some other woman than the innocent Mila to play, with the aid of some slight resemblance or of a similar costume, the part of the person who was to appear in his garden. The abbé was sometimes insultingly suspicious, because he was a horrible coward; but, blinded by ridiculous presumption, and impelled by lecherous impatience, he would have fallen into the trap. A little violence, a man stationed behind the gate, would have sufficed to place him in the bandit's hands. There were many other ruses to which the Piccinino was accustomed to resort, and which might have succeeded as well; for the abbé, with all his scheming, his inquisitiveness, his incessant espionage, his impudent falsehoods and his shameless persistence, was a villain of the lowest order, and the stupidest and least adroit man on earth. People are too much afraid of knaves as a general rule; they do not know that the majority of them are fools. Abbé Ninfo would not have had to take half the trouble to do twice the harm, if he had had ever so little intelligence and real penetration.

For instance, we have seen that he was always beside the truth in his discoveries. He had assumed innumerable disguises and invented a thousand time-worn methods of watching what was taking place at Villa Palmarosa; and he was thoroughly persuaded that Michel was the princess's lover. He was a hundred leagues from suspecting the nature of the tie between them. He might easily have deceived Doctor Recuperati, whose unswerving uprightness lacked foresight and intelligence; and yet, desiring to steal the will from him, he had delayed from day to day, and had never succeeded in gaining his confidence in the slightest degree. It was impossible for him to play for five minutes the rôle of a well-meaning

man, his face bore so unmistakably the stamp of unalloyed and unbounded baseness.

His vices embarrassed him, as he himself admitted, even proclaimed, when he was intoxicated. Dissolute, avaricious, and so intemperate that he fuddled his brain when lucidity was most essential to him, he had conducted a difficult intrigue to a successful end. The cardinal had for a long time made use of him as a police agent for whom no task was too vile, and he had never valued him except as a tool of the lowest order. In his days of cynical wit, the prelate had branded him with an epithet which we shall not attempt to translate, and from which he had never been able to rise.

Thus he had had no share in the family affairs and secrets of State which had filled the life of Monsignor Hieronymo. The contempt which he inspired in his master had survived his loss of memory, and the aged prelate, paralyzed and almost in his dotage, was not even afraid of him, and recovered the power of speech with him only to call him by the degrading sobriquet which he had previously bestowed on him.

Another proof of the abbé's idiocy was his cherished conviction that he could seduce all the women who aroused his desires.

"With a little money and a lot of lies," he would say, "with threats, compliments and promises, a man can obtain the proudest or the humblest of them."

Consequently he flattered himself that he could obtain a share of Agatha's fortune by effecting the removal of the man whom he presumed to be her lover. He was capable of but one thing, of placing Michel at the muzzle of a bandit's gun, and shouting *fire!* in a moment of disappointed vanity and greed; he would not have dared to kill him himself, just as he would not have dared to do

violence to Mila, if she had threatened him with nothing more than a pair of scissors.

But, abject wretch that he was, he had a certain power for evil; it did not spring from him, the villainy of other men had invested him with it. The Neapolitan police lent him its dastardly and odious assistance when he requested it. He had caused many innocent victims to be exiled, ruined, or cast into dungeons, and he might very well have seized Michel without having recourse to the brigands of the mountain. But he wished to be able to surrender him, at need, for a heavy ransom, and he wished to have the terms of ransom discussed by avowed brigands, whose interest it would be not to betray him. His whole rôle consisted in seeking out the *bravi* and saying to them: "I have discovered a love intrigue which is worth something. Do the job, and we will divide the profits."

But herein again he had been gulled. A shrewd *bravo*, who *worked* in the city under the Piccinino's direction, and who would not have presumed to do anything without consulting him, had deceived the abbé by inviting him to a rendezvous at which he had not seen the real Piccinino, who was present, however, behind a partition. The Piccinino had thereupon threatened to break the head of the first of the two accomplices who should say a word or take a step without orders from him, and they knew that he was a man to keep his word. Indeed, the young adventurer governed his band with such extraordinary skill, with a mixture of gentleness and despotism so well blended, that his father had not been so loved and dreaded as he was, although, to be sure, he had acted upon a larger scale and his enterprises had been more extensive. He could be perfectly at ease, therefore; his secrets would not have been revealed under torture, and he was

able to gratify the caprice which he frequently had, of carrying out entirely alone, without a confidant and without assistance, an undertaking in which he had no need of using main force, but only of craft and strategy.

That is why the Piccinino, sure of the success of his plan, which was of the simplest, chose to blend with it, on his own account, poetic, strange, and romantic incidents, or real passions, according to his whim. His vivid imagination and his cold nature involved him constantly in contradictory enterprises, from which he was always able to extricate himself, thanks to his great intelligence and his self-control. He had always sailed his craft so skilfully that, outside of his accomplices and the very small number of his intimate friends, no one could have proved that the famous captain, Piccinino, natural son of the *Destatore*, and the placid villager Carmelo Tomabene were one and the same man. The latter also was supposed to be a son of Castro-Reale; but there were so many others in the mountains who prided themselves upon that perilous origin!

XXXV

THE COAT OF ARMS

Thus the one really formidable enemy of the Lavoratori family, had he chosen to assume that character, was the Piccinino; but Mila had no suspicion of it, and Fra Angelo relied upon that element of heroism which formed, if we may so express it, half of his ward's character.

The worthy monk was not free from anxiety, none the less; he had hoped that he would soon see him again, and have an opportunity to make sure of his disposition in the matter: but he had waited and sought in vain. He was beginning to wonder if he had not turned the wolf into the sheepfold, and if it were not a great mistake to act in concert with men who were capable of doing what one would not be willing to do oneself.

He went to Villa Palmarosa at the usual hour for the daily siesta, and found Agatha preparing to enjoy the delights of that moment of repose so essential to Southern peoples.

"Set your mind at rest, my dear padre," she said, "my anxiety vanished with the daylight. At dawn I was so far from confident concerning your ward's purposes, that I went myself to make sure that he had not murdered Michel during the night. But the child was sleeping quietly and the Piccinino had already gone."

"You went yourself to investigate, signora? What will the people in the suburb say of such a proceeding?"

"They will never know anything about it, I trust. I was alone and on foot, entirely covered by an old-fashioned *mazzaro*,* and, if I met any persons who know me, they certainly did not recognize me. However, my good padre, I no longer have any serious fears. The abbé knows nothing."

"You are sure of it?"

"I am perfectly sure, and the cardinal is as incapable of remembering anything whatsoever, as the doctor represented him to be. Nevertheless, the abbé has evil projects on hand. Would you believe that he supposes Michel to be my lover?"

* A black silk cloak, which covers the whole body and the head.

"And the Piccinino believed it?" said the monk, in dismay.

"He believes it no longer," replied Agatha. "I received a note from him this morning in which he gives me his word that I can be perfectly at ease; that the abbé will be in his power in the course of the day, and that until then he will find a way to keep him so busy that we shall hear nothing from him. So I breathe freely, and have only one subject of anxiety; that is, to know how I am to escape the intimacy of Captain Piccinino hereafter, for he threatens to become too attentive. But we will talk of that later; sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof; and if, after all, it should become necessary for me to tell him the truth—You do not think him the man to abuse it, do you?"

"I know that he is the man to pretend that he proposes to take advantage of and abuse every opportunity; but have the courage to treat him always as a paragon of sincerity and generosity, and you will see that he will try to live up to the character, and will do it, in spite of the devil."

The princess and the Capuchin talked together for a long while, and mutually informed each other of all that they knew. After which, Fra Angelo went down to Catania to cancel Magnani's orders, to make another appointment with him to meet Agatha, and to take his place as escort to Michel and his father to the Marquis della Serra's palace; for, in spite of everything, Fra Angelo did not like the idea of their being alone in the country, so long as he himself had not seen the *Destatore's* son.

We will follow these three members of the Lavoratori family to the marquis's villa, leaving Mila in anxious expectation of the monk's visit, while Magnani, working on

the gallery opposite her room, was far from suspecting that, after asking his assistance, she was watching for an opportunity to steal out of sight. She had promised her father to go and dine with her friend Nenna, as soon as she had washed and ironed a veil which she said that she must have to wear. Everything happened as her unknown friend had predicted. She saw the monk at the fountain, and had no need to feign a most intense fear of being taken by surprise, for she asked herself in dire distress what Magnani would think of her if, after what she had told him, he should see her voluntarily talking with that miserable wretch.

To avoid the necessity of speaking to him and looking at his disgusting face, she tossed him a written paper which he read with the utmost delight; then he went away, throwing her kisses which made her quiver with disgust and indignation.

At that moment her father, brother, and uncle, having no shadow of suspicion of the perils to which the poor child was about to expose herself for them, entered the Della Serra palace. That sumptuous dwelling, more modern than that of Palmarosa, from which it was separated only by their respective great parks and a narrow valley covered with gardens and grass, was filled with artistic objects, statues, urns, and magnificent paintings, which the marquis had collected with the enthusiasm of an earnest and enlightened connoisseur. He came forward in person to meet the Angelos, shook hands with them cordially, and, pending the dinner-hour, took them all over his noble residence, showing to them and explaining courteously, and with no less wit than good sense, the masterpieces of art with which it was embellished. Pier-Angelo, although a simple decorator, had excellent taste, and a due appreciation of the beautiful in art. He was

peculiarly susceptible to the charm of all those marvellous things with which he was already familiar, and his artless yet profound reflections enlivened the most serious conversation instead of lowering its tone. Michel was a little embarrassed at first in the marquis's presence; but as he soon discovered that his father's natural and unconstrained manner seemed to a man of sense like the marquis in unexceptionable taste and most becoming, he felt more at ease; and finally, when he found himself sitting at a table laden with silver plate, decorated as handsomely and with as great an abundance of flowers as for the entertainment of the most illustrious guests, he forgot his prejudices, and talked as freely and interestingly as if he had been the marquis's own son or nephew.

A single thing disturbed him strangely during the dinner: the expression and attitude which he attributed to the marquis's servants; I say which he attributed, because he dared not look at them. He had dined many a time at the tables of the rich when he was in Rome, especially after his father returned to Catania, and he no longer had a family to keep him at home and prevent his seeking the society of the fashionable youth of the city. So that he did not fear any affront for himself; but, as it was the first time that he and his father had been invited to dine abroad with a patrician, he suffered torments at the idea that the lackeys might shrug their shoulders and pass the dishes rudely to the excellent old man.

In truth those lackeys might well have had a feeling of anger and contempt, having seen Pier-Angelo on his ladder so many times in that same palace, and treated him as their equal.

Nevertheless, whether because the marquis had prepared them by a word or two of kindly and straightfor-

ward explanation calculated to flatter and soothe the sensitive self-love of men of that class, or because Pier-Angelo was so great a favorite with all who knew him that even footmen laid aside their customary pride in his favor, they served him with much deference. Michel observed it at last, when his father, turning to an old servant who was filling his glass, said to him with a smile:

"Many thanks, old fellow; you wait on me like a friend. I'll do as much for you when I have the chance."

Michel flushed and glanced at the marquis, who smiled with a touched and gratified air. The old servant also smiled at Pier-Angelo with a friendly glance.

After the dessert was removed, the marquis was informed that Master Barbagallo, the princess's majordomo, was waiting in one of the rooms of the palace to show him a picture. They found him in conference with Fra Angelo, whose sobriety and restless activity made him impatient of a long sitting at table, and who had asked leave to walk about the grounds immediately after the first course.

At first, the marquis went alone to Barbagallo, to ask if he had any private message for him from the princess; and when they had exchanged in an undertone a few words which seemed to be of no importance, to judge by their faces, the marquis returned to Michel and said, putting his arm through his:

"Perhaps it will afford you some pleasure to see my family portraits, which are in a separate gallery, and which I had forgotten to show you. Don't be alarmed at the multitude of ancestors assembled under my roof. You can look them over at a glance, and I will call your attention particularly only to those which are the work of some great master. However, it is an interesting collection of

costumes, which a historical painter might consult with advantage. But, before going in, let us cast a glance at this one which Master Barbagallo has brought to us, having just disinterred it in the lofts of Villa Palmarosa.—My dear child," he added, in a low voice, "pray bestow a greeting on the poor majordomo, who is outdoing himself in reverences, being ashamed, doubtless, of his behavior to you at the princess's ball."

Michel at last noticed the majordomo's advances, and replied to them without resentment. Since he had become reconciled to his position and to himself, he felt that he was cured of his over-sensitiveness, and believed, with his father, that no impertinence can reach the man who possesses his own esteem.

"This which I present to your excellency," said the majordomo to the marquis, "is a very much dilapidated Palmarosa; but, although the inscription had almost disappeared, I have succeeded in deciphering it, and here it is on a bit of paper."

"What!" said the marquis, with a smile, "you succeeded in reading that this swashbuckler was a captain in the reign of King Manfred, and that he accompanied John of Procida to Constantinople? That is wonderful. For myself, I read the original inscription with the eyes of faith!"

"You can be perfectly sure that I am not mistaken," replied Barbagallo. "I knew this gallant captain well, and I have been trying for a long time to find his portrait."

Pier-Angelo roared with laughter.

"Ah! so you lived in those days!" he said; "I knew that you were older than I am, Master Barbagallo, but I didn't suppose that you saw our Sicilian Vespers!"

"Would that I had not seen it!" exclaimed Fra Angelo, with a sigh.

"I must explain Master Barbagallo's learning, and the interest he takes in my family gallery," said the marquis to Michel. "He has passed his life in this labor of patience, and no one is so familiar as he with Sicilian genealogies. My family was connected by marriage in the past with the Princess of Palmarosa's, and even more closely with the family of Castro-Reale, of which you have doubtless heard."

"I heard a great deal about it yesterday," replied Michel, with a smile.

"Very good; when I became the last heir of that family, after the death of the famous prince known as the *Destatore,* all that came to me by that succession—to which I gave very little thought, I promise you—was a collection of ancestors which I did not even care to unpack, but which Master Barbagallo, being enamored of curios of that sort, took pains to clean and classify, and to hang in their proper order in the gallery you are about to inspect. There were already in that gallery, in addition to my own direct ancestors, a goodly number of ancestors of the Palmarosa line, and Princess Agatha, who cares nothing for collections of the sort, sent me hers, saying that it would be better to collect them in a single place. That gave Master Barbagallo a very long and difficult task, which he executed with honor to himself. Come, all of you, for I have many characters to present to Michel, and it may be that he will need his father's and uncle's assistance to hold his own against so many dead men."

"I retire, in order not to impose my presence upon your lordships," said Master Barbagallo, after accompanying them to the gallery to deposit his Sicilian captain; "I will return some other time to put my picture in place; unless the signor marquis desires that I should

give Master Michelangelo Lavoratori, whose very humble servant I am to-day and always, the history of the originals of these portraits."

"What, signor majordomo," laughed Michel, "you know the story of all these characters? There are more than three hundred of them!"

"There are five hundred and thirty, your lordship, and I not only know their names and all the incidents of their lives, with their precise dates, but I also know the name, age, and sex of all the children who died before their features were reproduced, to be transmitted to posterity. There have been three hundred and twenty-seven, including those born dead. I have omitted none but those that never were baptized."

"That is marvellous!" said Michel; "but if I had been in your place, having such a memory, I should have preferred to learn the history of the human race rather than that of a single family."

"The human race doesn't interest me," replied the majordomo, gravely. "His excellency, Prince Dionigi de Palmarosa, father of the present princess, did not entrust me with the duty of teaching his children history. But, as I loved to be occupied, and as I had much time to myself, in a house where no banquets or parties have been given for two generations, he advised me, for amusement, to make a summary of the history of his family, which was scattered through a multitude of manuscript folio volumes, which you can see in the library at Palmarosa, and all of which I examined and studied to the last letter."

"And did it really amuse you?"

"Much, Master Pier-Angelo," the majordomo solemnly replied to the old painter's jocose question.

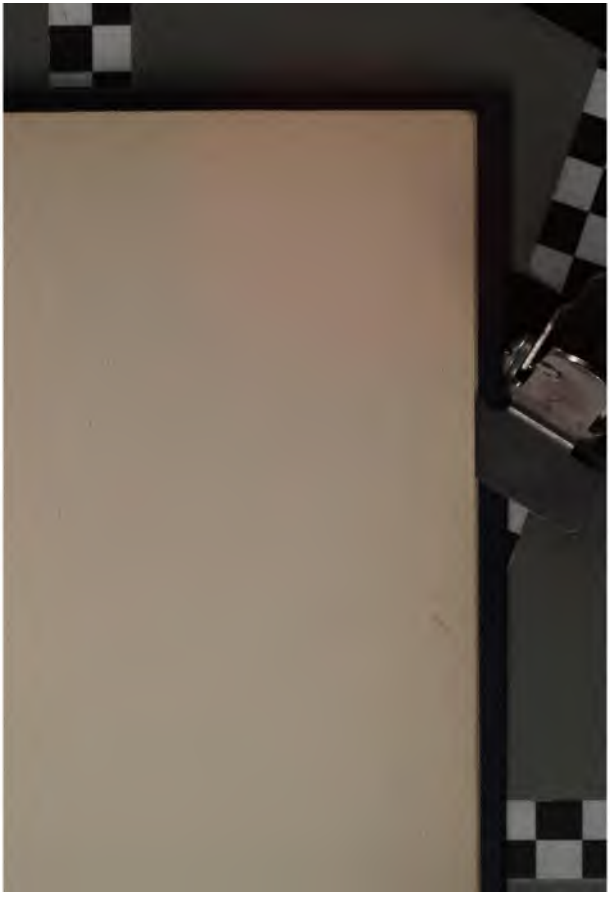
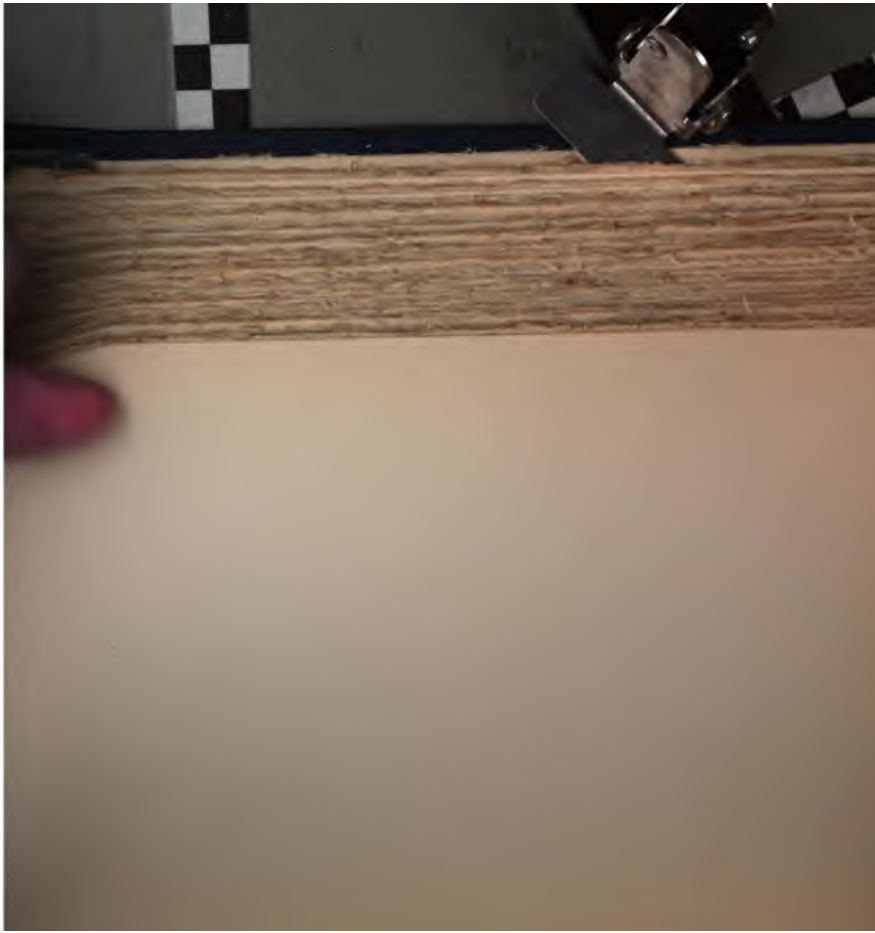
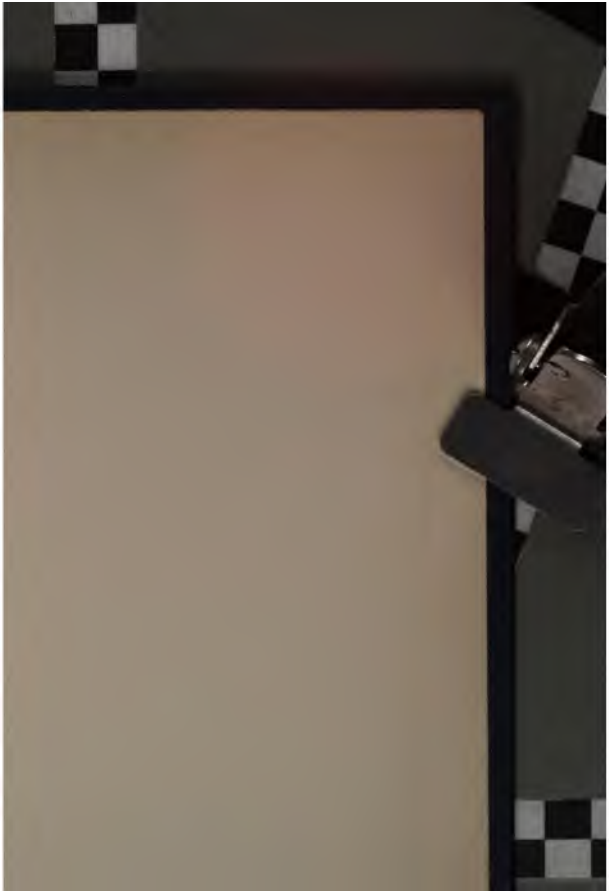
"I see," rejoined Michel, ironically, "that your lord-

ship is no ordinary steward, and that you are far more cultivated than your duties require."

"My duties, while not brilliant, have always been very pleasant," replied the majordomo, "even in Prince Dionigi's day, and he was pleasant to nobody but me. He had much consideration, almost friendship for me, because I was an open book which he could consult at any hour concerning his ancestors. As for the princess, his daughter, as she is kind to everybody, I cannot but be happy with her. I do almost exactly as I choose, and there are only three things about her that grieve me, and those are her giving up her family gallery, her never consulting her genealogical tree, and her not deigning to investigate the science of heraldry. And yet it is a delightful science, and one which ladies used to cultivate with success."

"And now it is a part of the stock in trade of decorators and gilders of wood," said Michel, laughing anew. "They are attractive ornaments of which the bright colors and the flavor of the days of chivalry please the eye and the imagination; that is all."

"That is all?" rejoined the scandalized steward; "pardon me, your lordship, that is not all. Heraldry is history written in hieroglyphics *ad hoc*. Alas! the time will soon come, perhaps, when we shall know how to read this mysterious writing better than the sacramental characters which cover the tombs and monuments of Egypt! And yet what profound and ingeniously expressed meaning there is in that figurative language! To place upon a seal, upon the bezel of a ring the whole history of one's own race—is not that the result of a marvellous art? And what more concise and more impressive signs have civilized people ever used?"

"What he says is not without a basis of reason and

common sense," said the marquis, in an undertone, addressing Michel. "But you listen to him with a disdainful expression which impresses me, young man. Come! say all that you think; I would like to hear it, in order to ascertain whether you have good reason for laughing at the nobility with a touch of bitterness, as you seem inclined to do. Do not be embarrassed; I will listen to you as calmly and disinterestedly as yonder dead men, who look down upon us with lifeless eyes, from their frames blackened by the lapse of time."